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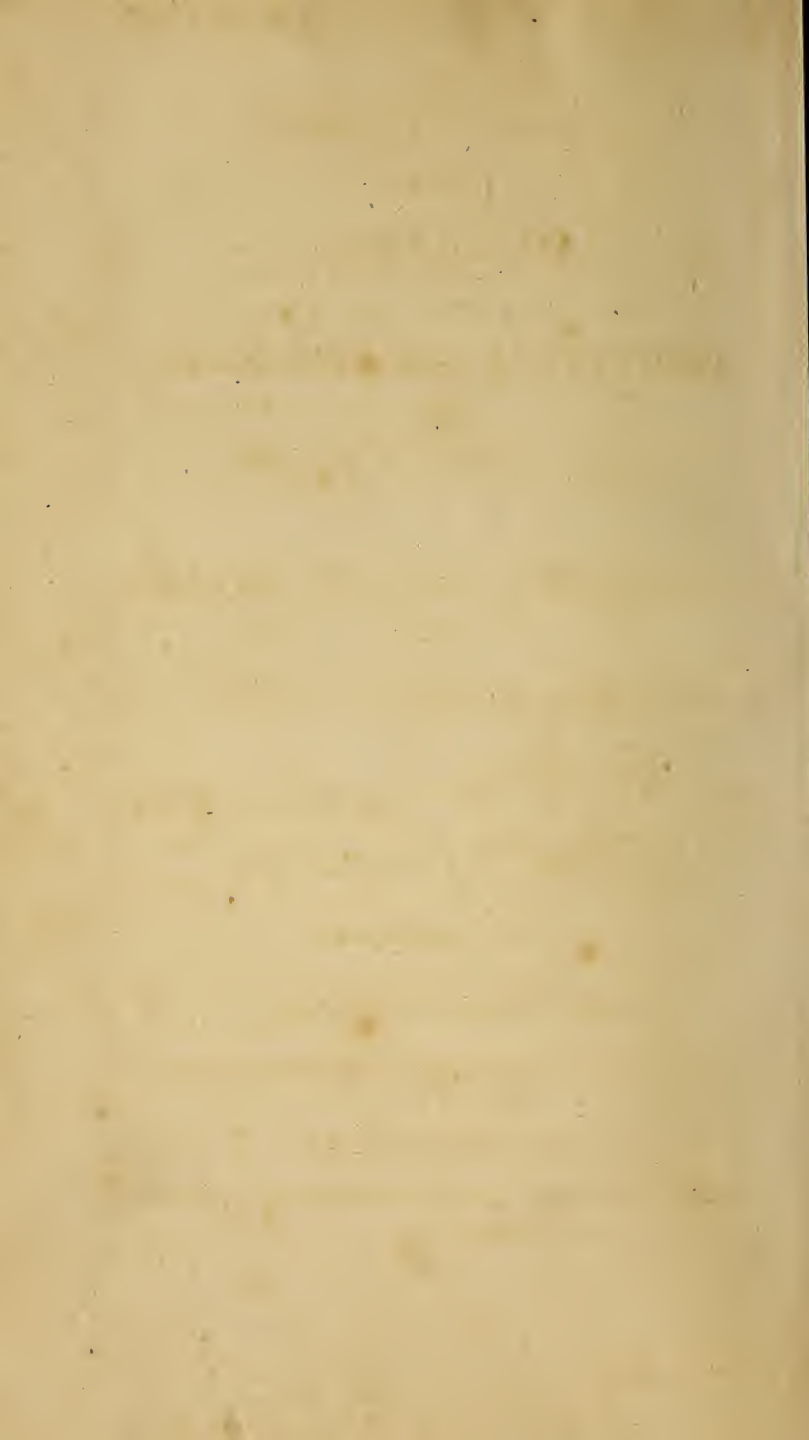
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REASONS FOR WITHDRAWING

FROM

SOCIETY WITH THE PEOPLE

CALLED

QUAKERS;

WITH

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

ON

SUNDRY IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A FRIENDLY EXPOSTULATION;

AND

SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

ON

REVELATION, THE SCRIPTURES, WAR,

MORALITY AND SUPERSTITION.

BY JOHN HANCOCK.

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Mr Hancock after the lapse
 of many years' serious consideration
 still retains the greater part of the
 sentiments expressed in the ensuing
 pages, with the exception of so
 close an adherence to the phraseology
 of the Act, in which he was educated.
 & of having altogether relinquished
 their doctrines of immediate retribution.

Lisburn ^{moth} 17. 1849.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE ensuing tracts were published at different times in Ireland, according to their respective dates, and are now offered to the British public in a collected form. I prefer exhibiting them in the plain dress, in which they originally appeared, without attempting to give them any additional polish, or to collect the sentiments into a regular series, because, in the present form, the reader may more clearly see the train of thought, as it arose, and as one idea led to another. My sole object is the investigation of truth, and to promote a spirit of serious and liberal enquiry; and in a pursuit of this important nature, I have sought neither literary nor personal reputation. A desire to procure literary fame, or to preserve a personal reputation, frequently influences an author to conform to the present fashion of the public taste, and to be more studious to please, than disposed to run the risk of offending by advancing bold, unpalatable truths, in an unadorned style: yet I desire to avoid a disposition to dogmatize, as I well know the weakness of human judgment, when accompanied even with the best intentions. I wish to state my sentiments with modesty, freedom and candour, and leave them to make their way as they may be found to deserve. I neither deprecate censure, nor court favour.

To search for truth, and publicly to acknowledge it in word and deed, in the worst of times, I account an essential duty—to obtain a superficial praise, by sacrificing clear convictions to public opinions, I hold not in estimation. May truth be established. To it, and to no other authority, I wish to bow.

Lisburn, in Ireland,
30th of 7th month, 1802.

J. H.

REASONS FOR WITHDRAWING

FROM

SOCIETY WITH THE PEOPLE

CALLED

QUAKERS;

AND

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

ON

SUNDRY IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.



THIRD EDITION.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1911

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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1911

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REASONS FOR WITHDRAWING

FROM

SOCIETY WITH THE PEOPLE

CALLED

QUAKERS.

I Am willing in this manner to state to the public, and especially to those who are acquainted with me, my reasons for the present apparent change in my conduct. I call it an apparent change, because I am not sensible of any further change in my sentiments, than what arises from a more free expansion of thought. I held the ground-work of them for years, while I continued in several instances an active member among the people called Quakers.

I had for a long time back viewed the departure in christian practice, which prevailed among this people to a very great degree, and often zealously testified against it privately and publicly, as they themselves very well know. In speaking of this lamentable degeneracy, I wish to be understood, as speaking with considerable allowance for individual exceptions—as a body, I believe they are corrupt; but I know those who in their individual character have withstood, in a good degree, the contagious effects of the wide-spreading degeneracy. I believe it will be found that the more religious sensibility is raised in the mind to attend to the correction of the evil disposition in our own hearts, the more lively will be the perception of the wrongs in others; as we advance in experience, we gradually find it more difficult, and at length altogether impossible “in all men to confide.” I consider this as a profitable operation of the human mind, and, within due limits, productive of the growth of true piety. We must lay aside the unsuspecting confidence of youth. An acquaintance with mankind in their present state affords a humiliating prospect of too general depravity; but,

however mortifying this prospect may be to a benevolent mind, there is this advantage to be gained from it, to be taught to be more diffident of ourselves, and watchful over our own conduct.

I have long beheld the Quaker society under a fair shew of an outward form, strengthening themselves in a high opinion of their attainments, like the Jews pay the tithe of mint, anise, and cumin, while they were neglecting the weightier matters of the law: they professed to bear a testimony against wars and fightings, they forebore taking up arms themselves, or contributing their personal services in such cases, and yet many in the general tenor of their conduct shewed, that they secretly desired their possessions should be defended by force of arms, and while they professed themselves followers of peace, were so only in name.

This disposition was also frequently shewn in their willingness to engage in litigious contentions; and, considering the smallness of their numbers, I believe it will be found they were as often engaged in suits at law as their neighbours. Where was the mild disposition of gentle forbearance? Indeed they evidently manifested, that while they were stiff in the observances of outward rules, they were lax in the design of coming up in the practical performance of the christian duties. To fill up their character, a great proportion of their members even in the foremost rank among them, not a few of those in the station of ministers and elders were trying to amass wealth, to aggrandise themselves and their families, and to ride as on the high places of the earth. I delight not in censure, except in defence of the cause of truth, which I believe may often be supported by pointing out the errors of wrong practice; and this is quite consistent in my judgment with the strictest and most enlightened ideas of christian charity; and those whom we hear most violent in their clamours against judging, will often be found to be such, who are, from an inward consciousness of defect, most afraid of having their conduct scrutinised into. Integrity of heart does not skulk for shelter under such subterfuges—the true christian is willing that his deeds should be brought to the light.

Perhaps many who read this address may now be ready to think that I am alleging against them, that which is not a crime. I believe this evil of the inordinate love of the world has not yet been sufficiently attended to and tracked through all its corrupt sources. I have contemplated it with much attention,

tion, and have beheld its enormity; to it may, I believe, be traced many of the ills, which are sapping the foundations of civil and religious societies.

This worldly spirit produces selfishness, and all the cold, unfeeling policy of commercial intercourse. I believe, trade, carried to its present overstrained pitch, has produced an abundant train of evils, and I expect there never will be a full reformation until the maxims of human policy are laid aside. Many are in this day worshipping their gods of gold and of silver, and though they are very fierce in crying up the Scriptures, are yet in their lives and conversations practically denying some of the important dictates of heavenly truth contained in them.

“ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”—Hear this, ye worldlings, to your condemnation; for I fully believe the faithful and true witness for God in every breast bears a similar testimony, when its genuine dictates are attended to. This testimony for truth has been too generally overlooked, and I verily believe, by none more than by the Quakers.—My mind is not of a gloomy cast; I feel no desire to live in this world as if there were no men in it, and I know a proper share of industry, within due limits, is necessary to provide for our reasonable wants in this life; but I think this care, allowable to a certain degree, has exceeded all due bounds, and employs a share of the attention of most, very disproportionate to its importance. It ought to be only a secondary care. The watching against the growth of our evil dispositions and passions, and the cherishing good dispositions, so that they may become confirmed into habits of piety and virtue, ought to be the first and principal engagement of beings placed on this earth in a state of trial, and candidates for a glorified existence hereafter, if they only join in with the operations of heavenly grace in their hearts, as the means of obtaining this great purpose—and nothing short of the strongest infatuation, and a state of blindness brought on through our disobedience to the divine law in the heart, could have induced mankind to act in so irrational a manner, as to give almost their whole attention to things relating to the body. To this, giving the preference to earthly things, I attribute most of the evils and erroneous judgments we form—superstition and formality have herein partly their origin—the mind almost entirely

engrossed in temporal concerns, does not spare men time to enquire for themselves into spiritual things—these they take upon credit without examination, and trust to others more implicitly in those things, which are of the greatest importance, than they would in some very trivial bargains, wherein the mighty object of temporal gain was concerned. Thus, many among the Quakers being much engrossed in secular pursuits, have lulled their consciences to sleep by a blind reliance on forms and outward performances—they have followed through imitation their predecessors, in their manner of speech and dress; and if they kept within the bounds of outward rule, thought all was well with them. I have enlarged on this subject from the firm persuasion that religion has not a more dangerous enemy, than the love of the world; and I think it is the more dangerous because it has not been so fully thought so, or placed as sufficiently in this point of view, as I believe it ought to have been.

When a society thus becomes degenerated, and a laxity of practice is attempted to be atoned for by orthodoxy of sentiment, the heart becomes cold—there is a fear to investigate truth. It is much easier to believe as they are bid, than to withdraw their attention from their secular affairs, to examine for themselves, and thus, like blind horses in a mill, they go round their accustomed track, without making any advance.

“ While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear

“ The insupportable fatigue of thought;

“ And, therefore, swallowing without pause or choice,

“ The total grist unsifted, husks and all.”

COWPER.

Thus, man becomes a mere machine—barters the exercise of his reason in spiritual things, that he may devote more fully his attention to the concerns of the present life; and provided he succeeds in this ignoble plan, allows himself to be led hoodwinked by the society to which he belongs, in regard to those things which most essentially concern him to know. Thus, conforming to rules without taking the trouble of examining whether they are right or wrong, serves as a passport to obtain the favour and the praise of men. But, as one rejecting the honour that comes from men, I claim my privilege of thinking for myself, and of publishing my thoughts. In doing so, I have no other wish than to promote free enquiry conducted on serious grounds, and while

while I reject all attempts to bind my conscience, I am equally desirous to avoid an attempt to lead others. I have no desire that any thing that I advance, should be regarded further than it may bring conviction to the unbiassed mind.

I am sensible that in the present state of the disposition of the people, which leads to a prejudice in favour of established modes, without taking the trouble to examine whether they are well founded or not, I expose myself to the censure of many in boldly expressing my sentiments; yet I am not deterred from doing so; and have now to state, that in addition to my former reason for withdrawing myself from the Quaker society, on account of unsound practice being so prevalent among them, I have this farther reason, that unsound principle was gaining ground fast. They appeared to be hastily measuring their steps back again to superstition, and returning to the beggarly elements. I admit that the first members of their society did not express themselves explicitly on some subjects. But, before we hastily condemn them, we have to consider the age they lived in—a season of semidarkness—a period of intellectual twilight. I think I discover in their writings, that amidst the clamour that was raised against them, for departing so far from the then established modes of thinking, they endeavoured to shelter themselves as much as they at all could, by keeping close in some things to the received opinions. They undoubtedly did much, but they did not do every thing; and though I highly venerate them as champions in the cause of truth in their day, I cannot bring myself implicitly to pin my faith on their sleeves. I highly respect their memories. I account them as honest fore-runners in the work of reformation; and if we at times find a degree of asperity in their controversial writings and conversations, I think it is but candid to attribute it more to the manners of the age, than to a defect in their individual character. But who immediately succeeded these reformers? Of whom was the next generation of the society mostly composed? If we may judge of their state by the minutes issued from their general meetings, I suspect by a few who formed a virtuous exception to the general state of degeneracy, they appear to have been generally more lovers of this world, than lovers of God. I refer the members of the society, who have these records in their possession, to them for a proof of this assertion. How, then, can we expect such a society to have carried on progressively, and advanced the work of reformation? The

many were employed in following after their covetousness; and the exercised few who grieved at these abominations, had to fill up their day's work in endeavouring to withstand the overwhelming torrent of degeneracy among their fellow members. Thus it continued in the successive generations down to the present day; and in this season of degeneracy, I have no doubt but many rightly concerned men and women, having honestly done the work of their day, were accepted by God. But at length a crisis is come—a stand must be made against the accumulated errors of so many generations—the night is far spent, the day is at hand—the current among every society has long run strongly towards degeneracy; but I trust that it is now setting in favour of pure, enlightened piety.

Now for my objections to what I conceive to be unsound principle; and here I expect to expose myself to much unthinking censure—and first with regard to my departure from received opinion as to that compilation of writings called the Scriptures.—The society of late required, I thought, an implicit adoption of them as truth. This, on deliberate and anxious enquiry, I could not receive; and when, on full investigation, I had made up my mind on this subject, honesty and sincerity forbade me to put on the appearance of tacitly submitting, while my heart inwardly disowned.—So, when I found the society systematically leaning to this side, I thought I could no longer, without violating the chastity of conscience, appear as the member of a society, whose conduct I inwardly disapproved. I do not find it to be my present business to use many words in explaining my opinion on this subject. I have endeavoured to weigh the matter, and to look carefully at it in every point of view. I briefly state my sentiments, and leave them to make way in the minds of others, as they may. If they are right, I have no doubt of their at last making their way in spite of opposition; for truth will ultimately prevail. I cannot receive the Scriptures as unmixed truth—there are some things, as the account of the creation, and many other relations therein, which I do not understand, and not considering the belief or disbelief of them to be essential to well-doing, I pass them by as things uninteresting to me. There are other accounts which I utterly disbelieve, as the assertion of God's sanctioning and commanding the horrid and wicked acts of the Jews, as a nation,
and

and even of their prophets, as many of the acts of *Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, and others. These things, I suppose, actually happened; but, I am firmly persuaded, were never perpetrated by divine command; and I consider it as a strange perversion of ideas, and unreasonably mixing and confusing things together, to make a belief in such things essential to religion. True religion consists in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. These acts so recorded, are directly opposite to the laws of justice and mercy. How, then, can I believe they were directions of him, who is infinite in every attribute of perfection; and whose ways assuredly are higher than men's ways, and his thoughts than men's thoughts?

As man is left a free agent by his Creator, I can conceive that when he chuses evil, he is permitted to follow the devices of his own heart, and to become a torment to himself, as well as to others—who, abusing their liberty of choice, suffer themselves to be driven from their centre; and this is the cause of much misery, of man's own bringing on; but man does evil by acting contrary to the will of God, and not, as the Scriptures assert, by his authority and command. We see also visitations of earthquakes, famines, and similar causes, sweeping off the inhabitants of the earth in large masses, in like manner as we behold the slow, but equally certain progress of death in other cases; but these things prove nothing as to the present case. It is appointed unto all men once to die; but we are now enquiring, whether man, a moral agent, an accountable creature, has been employed to execute judgment upon others, by doing an unrighteous act himself. If a house falls upon me, and kills me, there certainly is nothing in this act derogatory to the superintending goodness of God. But how different is the idea to suppose a man divinely commanded to throw a stone down upon my head? To believe such a thing possible, appears to me to be the greatest absurdity; and this absurdity not lessened by its having happened in another age of the world; for surely the will of God remains the same. Man may change—but with God there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Poor, foolish man has too often and too long attempted to represent the Almighty power, as moved by passions similar to his own depraved ones. When shall we form suffi-

* I. Kings, chap. xviii. ver. 40. II. Kings, chap. ii. ver. 24. I Samuel, chap. xv. ver. 32, 33.

ciently exalted ideas of Him who inhabiteth eternity—and cease blasphemously from representing him as the partaker of our wars, our controversies, and our crimes? Every society and every nation appear to consider the favour of God appropriated to their own sect or country, to the exclusion of others. True, enlightened, and liberal ideas of religion, teach us to consider him as the beneficent “Father of all in every age:”—that his will is perfect purity and goodness—and that when we give way to anger, cruelty, and revenge, we abuse our free agency, and act contrary to his will. I am verily persuaded that wars ever had their origin and continuance in every age of the world of past and present time, from those of both sides engaged therein, giving way to those hurtful passions, and in opposition to the counsel and will of God. How the members of a society, who profess to believe all present wars to be unlawful, will get rid of the difficulty and inconsistency of advocating the justice of wars being carried on by the Jews, I leave to their own consideration.

To account for the implicit reception of these accounts, I can only attribute it to the little attention paid to serious investigations, and to the mind being so fully occupied with other engagements. This belief was a cloak to want of thought, and a kind of shelter to the mind in its wrong pursuits. For my part, I treat the Scriptures as I would do any other book. I receive such parts of them as appear to me, on examination, to be dictated by the spirit of God; but I do not conceive them to have been written throughout by inspiration.

I cannot adopt the commonly received opinion of the fall of Adam having had any effect upon me. I believe that I am only responsible for my own wrong doings. I feel myself as an accountable creature—a free agent, with a full liberty to choose between good and evil. I admit, from a feeling sense of my own infirmities, that though I approve the things that are more excellent, I do at seasons follow the worse; but this proceeds from myself joining with the evil. I reject the doctrine of the imputed sin of Adam: and so I reject the imputed righteousness of Christ. It appears unessential to me to bewilder my mind by a curious disquisition respecting the person of Christ: this I believe not to be necessary to salvation, but having a tendency to withdraw my attention from myself, and the regulation of my own conduct (the one thing needful for me), and to lead me to unprofitable speculation on things not given us to know in this state,

state, and which, after all our searching, we can see and know but in part, while we continue tenants in mortality. We suffer great loss, while our attention is diverted from ourselves. The power of godliness, emphatically called the kingdom of heaven, is within us. It is there we must look for help to overcome evil, and herein, in my judgment, consists the sum and substance of true godliness, in attending to the discoveries of divine grace (the unspeakable gift of God), manifested through the conscience; and which hath appeared to all the children of men, without distinction of nation, clime, or colour; to those who have never heard the name of Jesus, as well as to those who are outwardly and professionally called by the name of Christ. I accept, with humble reverence, the holy pattern of unblemished excellence left us by Christ. I believe the spirit of God^f was poured forth upon him without measure. In this sense I acknowledge him to be the son of God, and desire to prove my love and gratitude to God, by endeavouring to follow his example. He obeyed the will of his father in all things; and so are his sincere followers called upon to do likewise—that by attending to the improveable talents committed to their stewardship, they may (though almost at an infinite distance), tread in the same path to blessedness. This, I believe, is the religion which the holy Jesus was the chosen messenger of God to publish in its purity to the world—a religion, when compared with that professed by many in his name, as unlike as their fruits are essentially different. Under the name of the christian religion, all manner of enormities have been committed—wars have been carried on, and attempts made to propagate religion by the sword—whereas, the pure and undefiled religion taught by him, at once proves the spurious origin of its counterfeit, and its own excellence, by manifesting the fruits of holiness; and when submitted to by man, assimilating him to its own nature, which is, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men.” The scope and tendency of the ministry of Jesus Christ was to turn the attention inward; and this is still the tendency of that gracious principle discovered in the heart of man: but the prevailing error of mankind, is substituting the shadow for the substance, trusting in the merits of a Saviour without them, and not attending to the manifestations of the grace of God within them, whose existence is undeniably proved by its checks, reproofs, and varied operations according to our respective wants.

An undue distinction has been attempted to be made between religion and morality, as if they were unconnected ; and even by the manner in which some speak of them, as if they were in opposition to each other. Let us examine the ideas commonly affixed to these words, and then see their true meaning. Religion has been confined by many to belief in certain systems, and the tenets of a sect ; and has often been only an assent without examination. Morality has been supposed to mean a mere attention to *some* of the duties of justice due from man to man—the fault which I find with it, is, this idea does not go far enough : I compare it as it is generally practised in the world to a gold coin deficient in weight. Religion appears to me to be an obligation on us to practise the strictest morality in every action of our lives ; to bring our deeds to this square, and comprehensively unites together our duties to God, to our neighbours, and to ourselves. Religion and morality joined together form a rule for conduct, which takes in every act of a true christian.

I have thus endeavoured in simplicity to throw out a few remarks as they impressed my mind. I expect they will be seen by different persons in very different points of view ; by some I may be thought to do much mischief to the cause of godliness, by thus attacking ancient foundations : to which I answer, that if the foundations are really good, nothing is able to shake them—what is substantially truth will stand, while error, though upheld for ages by prejudice and passion, will ultimately fail. But I feel conscious of honest intention. I am desirous to set matters in a right point of view, to clear away the reproach so generally brought upon religion, through the unrighteous practice and traditional opinions too generally prevalent. After all, right acting is the essential point, and the only tie which can bind us together. “ For whosoever (said Christ) shall do the will of my Father, who is in heaven, the same is my brother, sister, and mother.”

The reader is in possession of my sentiments. I call upon him to think coolly and soberly, and then to judge dispassionately. I know full well they are contrary to the generally received opinions of the various sects, into which the professors of christianity are divided, including most of the members of the society from whom I have separated ; yet I certainly believe there are enlightened minds, who are willing to see for themselves, though many of these are at present too solicitous to conceal their prospects, and from various causes, afraid to expose themselves by a
full

full avowal of their sentiments.—Yet singularity is not in itself a crime, nor a token of error. Sentiments, which have been long violently opposed by prejudice in favour of preconceived opinions, and on this account for a time made but little progress in the world, have at length been found to be true. I have ventured to express mine with some freedom, and believe I am only responsible to God for them—but I believe I am also responsible to him for the right employment of my time and rational faculties, and that if I do not give sufficient attention seriously to investigate truth for myself, and consequently am ignorant through my own neglect, ignorance will be imputed to me as a crime. The day is not far distant, when many, I believe, will have to avow similar doctrines. My most fervent desire for myself is that I may keep my mind unfettered by system, and open to the further discoveries of truth; and this is also my honest wish for others. Having no inclination to dictate, I have studied brevity. I seek not to lead opinion; but I have thrown out some hints, which, to serious, seeking minds, may serve as a clew to further investigation.—A little gained in this way is far preferable to a great mass of indigested sentiment gathered from others, and blindly adopted. There are some so obstinately bent on following the old track, without examining whether there may be a better way, that they dislike to have the possibility suggested to them, and clamorously revile such as attempt to say any thing of it. For such this little publication is not intended. My aim is not to persuade any to think as I do, but to set people on thinking and examining for themselves; and that which is gained by this exercise of the mind, is that only which in my view deserves the name of experience.

Lisburn: 5m. 30th, 1801.

JOHN HANCOCK.

POSTSCRIPT.

Some, perhaps, may enquire, what is to become of children on this plan of allowing all to think for themselves. To which I answer, let parents and those who have the care of children watch steadily over their own conduct, so as to endeavour to set them a good example—let them also treat the children with meekness and tenderness, not attempting to enforce them *what* to think, but teaching them *how* to think. Children have hitherto in general been taught sentiments by rote, and the great and essential part of right education neglected, of directing their attention to the inward regulation of their conduct. This required more time than many parents were willing to abstract from their worldly pursuits; and thus the poor children greatly suffered through the neglect of the parents. The business of the right education of children is an object very near to my heart. I wish that they may be tenderly and closely watched over, and the forbidding austerity of stern authority laid aside towards them. Let us conduct ourselves so that we may be fit companions for our children. Where the principal bent of the mind is turned to the sordid desire of gain, and our conversation partakes of such a tincture, it is unprofitable for children to hear. I hope there is some improvement in the manner of treating children; but much, very much, yet remains to be done.

Just be thy word—in every thought sincere;
And know no wish, but what *thy child* may hear.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS:

BEING A

SEQUEL

TO

REASONS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM SOCIETY

WITH THE

PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS.

THIRD EDITION.

1700

1700

1700

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ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS,

8c.

PREFACE.

I Have already published my reasons for withdrawing from the Quakers society, and it is with reluctance I again take up the pen. I dislike controversy, and wish to guard carefully against falling into the spirit of a controversialist, with whom victory over an opponent, and not a sober investigation of truth, is a primary object. Nothing short of a settled persuasion that it is a duty, could induce me to address the public in this manner; for, with regard to many, I fear they are so settled down in the formality of a profession, and stand so well with themselves, that nothing of this kind can move them: yet, with regard to others, I feel it a duty to do my part towards them, by placing some matters before their view, that they may escape the danger of blindly following the blind; and therefore, without further preface, I submit the following observations.—But I am desirous to premise one matter, that though in the ensuing pages I may sometimes have occasion to speak of myself, I by no means am solicitous to vindicate my reputation in the sight of men; I am only desirous to have the answer of a good conscience towards GOD; I am willing to suffer the reproach of men, and for the uprightness of my intentions, I appeal from the prejudices of many in the present age, to a period when the true knowledge of GOD will more generally prevail in the earth; and the arising of the sun of righteousness dispel the clouds of darkness and the mists of superstition, which, in different degrees, have overspread every visible church.

ON DISCIPLINE.

WHETHER the care and rule exercised by a society over its members really prove salutary, or produce a hurtful effect, depends very much on the disposition and spirit in which it is conducted. As man is feeble and liable to go astray, a watchful care over one another, conducted in a christian spirit, may to a certain degree be useful, and the exclusion of refractory members allowable. But of this I am fully convinced, that without due watchfulness great abuses will creep into a society by this way; on the part of the active members or rulers pride may be nourished, and a degree of self-confidence and much of a pharisaical spirit be indulged; and on the part of the ruled, a blind compliance with rules, not from the result of conviction, producing hypocrisy, and a disposition to hide from the view of men. Thus both rulers and ruled in a course of church discipline will be much injured without circumspect care. I believe that discipline among the people called Quakers, is more strictly attended to than among other societies; and from a long acquaintance with them, I am bold to assert, that it has produced much of the evils which I have spoken of. Being by many conducted in too superficial a manner, a superficial observance of the mere outward rule became too prevalent; and the bulk of the society did not consider what was right and proper in itself, but only looked to what the written rule enjoined. Now, no written rule can take in every case; and varying circumstances of cases, and of times, require varied modification. Some years ago an attempt was made for reformation by a few in the society—for a while they were allowed to go on in their attempt to reform abuses; but their being allowed to proceed for a short season was very much owing to the listlessness and unwillingness of the many to abstract much of their attention from their worldly pursuits; but at length when they found their rest likely to be disturbed by these reformers, they then hastily united together to cry down all attempts at reform, and to brand the supporters of a more pure line of discipline, with the epithets of "New-Light," &c.

Some of those who had embarked in the cause of reform, finding all their efforts to stem the torrent of degeneracy ineffectual, have withdrawn from the society—some altogether publicly re-
nouncing

nouncing communion with them, and others withdrawing from taking an active share in their councils. In this the present situation of things among them, the reproof publicly given them in one of their general meetings, by one who was renouncing connection with them, was very applicable.—He told them that their system was dead ; and that there was room enough in it for the libertine, but not for the truly exercised christian ; this is assuredly the case. I appeal to facts ; if we closely examine the superficial manner in which a great many support what they call the peculiar testimonies of the society, this will conspicuously appear.

Enquire of many of them the ground of these testimonies, and their answer is—their forefathers established them, and the rules of the society require them to be observed. They give up an individual enquiry, and blindly adopt, without examination. The consequence of such a line of conduct is, that even though the things adopted may be right in themselves, their manner of adopting them is lifeless and spiritless, and sinks into insipid formality. Thus it is with regard to one testimony, which has peculiarly distinguished the society—their objection to pay tithes, and demands of a like nature.

I think the first of the society in their objections against hiring men to preach to them, and against all compulsory maintenance for preaching, made a noble stand against superstition ; for surely the Gospel ought to be free, without money, and without price. But how has this testimony, sublime in itself, dwindled into insignificance in the hands of many of their successors ? so as to become only a compliance with the rule of a society, instead of being supported with that energetic yet moderate firmness, which is the result of deliberate conviction.

Another of the testimonies they professed to bear, was against war. But how was this maintained ? Few actually took up arms ; but many shewed they had no dislike to draw gain to themselves from this corrupt source, and to have their possessions defended by others, or at least that they were only prevented from joining more openly, by the outward rule, and not from a settled conviction of its inconsistency.

To exemplify this, I shall adduce an instance. While this country was much agitated, about five or six years ago, by internal commotions, before the late disturbances actually broke out, some of those whom I have already spoken of, as desirous to promote reformation among the society, thought it expedient

advise their fellow members, to destroy guns and such like instruments, to remove a temptation from any of the society to use them in their own defence or otherwise, and to prevent them falling into the hands of either of the contending parties. Here it may be necessary to state, that notwithstanding their profession against war and self-defence, not a few of the members of this society kept arms for their defence; others kept them for domestic purposes, in the country, as they alleged, and many retained them for the purpose of amusement. The subject of the members of society keeping arms, came under consideration of their general meetings, and it ended in a minute recommending their being destroyed; as considering it improper to keep them for defence or amusement, and inexpedient in the present disturbed state of the country to keep them for domestic purposes. This recommendation was an honest attempt for reformation; but though under the name of the society, was in reality only the act of a few, for the reasons I have already assigned of the general state of listlessness of many of the members; but when it came to be carried into effect, in what an evasive manner did many act? Some retained their arms under one subterfuge or another, and upon the whole it was to me clearly manifest, that the society as a body were too far degenerated to act up to the compliance with a pure rule. This was one of the last steps, in which I was active among them in their discipline. My mind was progressively opened to see, that it would be fruitless to make further attempts for reformation among them, to arouse them from their lifeless adherence to forms, and bring them to see that something farther was necessary, than a compliance with the mere rule or law, which made not the comers thereunto perfect. So, after some time of close and deliberate consideration, I believed it right for me totally to separate myself from this body; which I accordingly did, by refraining from the attendance of their meetings.

For the information of the reader, and giving him an opportunity of judging for himself of the state of this people, and not for the purpose of justifying myself, or wantonly exposing them; I now proceed to state some letters which I sent to them, and the testimony of their disunity with me, with some remarks on the latter. I feel nothing but good-will to them and all mankind; and have no other view in the exposing of errors, but to promote the cause of truth, by sober, yet free, enquiry.

Some

Some months after I had separated from them, I sent to them the following letter :—

*“ To the Monthly Meeting to be held near Ballenderry,
7th mo. 16th, 1801.*

“ When I last came among you to express what then lay upon my mind, an attempt was made in a very improper manner to interrupt me ; I now take this mode of addressing to you, what may probably be my final expostulation ; I, however, do not seek in the smallest degree to prevent your going on with the testimony of your disunity, which I understand you have ordered to be drawn up against me, I have already in a very public manner testified my disunity with you, and object not in the least to your making your disunity with me as public as you please. I only request a copy of what you may issue on the occasion. But I wish to speak plainly and honestly to you at parting, and yet I feel my mind covered with true love towards you all.

“ My dissent from you has not been a hasty step. The progress of it has been gradual in my mind. You are witnesses, that for several years past, I took little share in your deliberations ; but when I did attend your monthly meetings of discipline, I was mostly a silent suffering spectator among you—the reason was, because I could not join with you in the spirit in which you acted, and in which you attempted to carry on the discipline ; I could not join with you in your appointments. None can support the cause of truth, where others are concerned, who do not submit to true christian discipline in themselves. You were generally lovers of this world. Some of you, in what you called religious performances, sought the vain honour which comes from men ; hence proceeded a tedious repetition of unfeigned expressions, and the cold language of the lip. You were led by your passions ; some, however, by more malignant ones than others. I pity the poor youth, they are so much in the air ; but some of the parents and others are also in the air ; and besides, loving the world with avidity is a most dangerous species of libertinism, therefore, the aged have need to pluck the beam out of their own eyes, before they attempt to take the mote out of their children’s eyes. I have been a witness to these things among you for many years. I speak from experience, and long acquaintance with you. With regard to the society at large, I had looked for reformation com-

ing about in that line, and zealously laboured to promote it; but latterly their general state of unsoundness appeared so manifest in my view, though with some individual exceptions, that after having faithfully warned them, and testified against their wrong practices, as long as I felt the requireing of duty authorising me in this painful labour, I believed my duty lay in separating myself from them; which I have accordingly done, and thus withdrew myself from labour which I was persuaded would be unavailing.

“ I conclude with expressing my sincere wish, that you may become so humble, as to find a place of true repentance; then would the lofty come down from their present exalted stations. I would willingly add my hope that this might be the case, if the feelings of my mind permitted me to do so; but, alas! I fear your state resembles the Jews’, who, though zealous for the law and the outward temple, yet made not their hearts clean; to whom Christ addressed this language when he wept over the city: ‘ If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.’

“ Though I cannot unite with you, I retain love unfeigned for you, in which I sincerely wish you may do well.

“ *Lisburn: 7th mo. 8th, 1801.*

JOHN HANCOCK.”

I understand they read this letter in their meeting, and a few days afterwards two of their members called upon me, and shewed me a paper of their disunity with me. One of them objected to my having the liberty of taking a copy of it, and said the meeting had directed, that I should not have a copy. But as I had it in my possession, it having been handed to me to read, and conceiving that I was entitled to take a copy, I accordingly did so, and it is as follows:—

“ After a long and dark night of apostacy, in which the true church retired into the wilderness, it was pleasing to Almighty God, in those latter days, to sound forth the everlasting gospel of his beloved son, Christ Jesus, in those lands, making use of an instrument well fitted and qualified for that great and important purpose. Many in that day received those glad tidings with joy, and feeling in themselves the living evidence of that light and truth, which he was commissioned to preach, joined in with it,
and

and being baptized with the one baptism, were thereby made one in spirit, one in faith, and in the Lord's time, and under his Almighty power, became one body, even a visible church, to the praise of his great name.

“ The same divine wisdom that first gathered this people, saw meet to make use of the same instrument to establish a church discipline among them, to be as a rule in government under the influence of their holy head, Christ Jesus. This has been with little variation observed by this people to this day, as an outward rule of conduct, to inform the unwary, and those who may be inclined to take liberties inconsistent with that high and holy profession of religion we are making. This was our beginning, and thus were we united.

“ JOHN HANCOCK, of Lisburn Meeting, had his education among us, the people called Quakers, and was an acknowledged minister among us. His conduct was orderly, a steady attender of meetings for worship and discipline, and a zealous supporter of the good order established among us; and, though he ran well for a time, through unwatchfulness, he has latterly forsaken the attendance of those meetings which he had contributed to support, and his example influencing his children which are at home, they also have refrained from our meetings, as well as many others in divers places. To hold meetings with other societies without the consent and approbation of the monthly meeting, to which the party belongs, is advised against, and is contrary to our discipline: this he has frequently practised, though tenderly advised against it. He also gave encouragement by his presence, together with some of his children, and servant, to a proceeding by way of marriage, between two of our members, in direct opposition to our well known rules on that head, and to the care which friends had exercised on that occasion. And of late, he has published in print a pamphlet, entitled, “ Reasons for withdrawing from society with the people called Quakers,” containing animadversions on the Scriptures, and some doctrines therein, which we as a society have not unity with. Now, in order to bear our testimony against this disorderly conduct, (and as much as we can to shut the door against this delusive, false liberty, that has crept in among us) we do publish this our testimony against the said John Hancock; nor can we hold unity with him, as a member, or minister, till his eyes are again mercifully anointed, that he may see the delusion he has fallen into, and be enabled

to condemn that conduct, which we, as a society, have not unity with."

I have been since informed by their clerk, that the monthly meeting altered a word in the foregoing paper, by substituting *one* instead of *some*, in the account of my children who attended the marriage. This paper was afterwards read in one of their public meetings; but not until after I had sent them the following note:—

" JOHN HANCOCK has taken a copy of the paper handed to him yesterday by John Conran and John Barcroft on behalf of the monthly meeting of Lisburn: this he conceives he was warranted in doing, as a matter of right. He forbears entering upon a statement of his objections to the paper, though he thinks he could produce solid and substantial objections to almost every paragraph; because he believes neither they nor the meeting they represent, have open ears to hear or to judge impartially of what he might have to answer. He had remained altogether silent on the present occasion, only he feared his silence might be construed into an acquiescence with the paper, and as perhaps he may hereafter state his objections to it in such a manner as he may think best; in the mean time he believes any further explanation to them on his part, would only have a tendency to lead into an unavailing and unprofitable controversy, from which he believes it to be his duty to guard his mind. He is assuredly convinced, that a day is approaching, which will more fully manifest the foundations of all, and discover clearly who are those who are under the delusion; whether it be those who are desirous to purchase truth, experimental truth for themselves at the expence of reputation among men, or those who while they are pleasing themselves in earthly pursuits, are at ease in their formal and self-complacent performances.

" *Lisburn: 7th mo. 20th, 1801.*

" *To John Conran and John Barcroft, and to the ensuing Monthly Meeting of Lisburn.*"

When a society speaks so highly of its origin, it is a proof to me of its present fall. I believe with regard to the Quaker society, that it began in the spirit; but, alas! its present active members are seeking to be made perfect in the flesh. I can only compare it

it to the fair mummy of a body once animated with life, that falls to powder on the admission of free air—so some of the highly-applauded institutions of this society have appeared in my view ; not but I think a solid foundation was laid by the first members of this society capable of further extension, if the present members had been pure enough to build on it ; but in what pompous expressions is their first rise spoken of?—George Fox is held up in the same spirit, and nearly in the same style, as some speak of the Pope. Thus, superstition is identically the same in every fallen church—an attempt is made to deify man and to build on him, instead of recurring to that sure foundation, that is the same in all ages. It is nothing to me what my ancestors were, but it essentially concerns me to know what I am myself. We have been long looking backwards ; it is time to look forwards. I desire it may be observed, that by what I say of their setting up George Fox, I by no means intend to speak disparagingly of him ; on a close investigation of his character, making allowances for the manners of the age in which he lived, I hold him as a truly estimable man ; and I believe, if he were living in the present day, he would renounce communion with the society, and many of those who are so desirous to follow him in name, while they are unacquainted with the spirit in which he acted. In this respect they resemble the Jews, who prided themselves on being the children of Abraham, without following the example of Abraham in such of his actions as were right.

I now proceed to notice some of their charges against me ; and first, as to my absenting myself from their meetings, and my example in this respect influencing my children. I have already stated, that I have withdrawn from their society, and of course I decline the attendance of their meetings : as to my children, I cannot advise them to go to meetings ; for I believe my pressing them to keep in this form, would not be holding up the standard of true righteousness in their view. Their next charge is, holding meetings without their consent—I reject the licence from this society to preach, as much as I do the ordination of any other men. I believe many of them are incompetent judges of what is true gospel ministry, and even some who take on them the rank of ministers, are little acquainted with the painful exercises attendant on this office rightly entered into. There are men-made ministers, and self-actuated teachers, among those who boast so highly of the purity of their ministry. My submitting to their forms

forms in this respect, has been a grievous burden to me; and on my returning the last certificate I had from them, I told them I expected I never could take another. If we consider the mixed body, of which the monthly meeting who give certificates is composed, how can we expect just discrimination in such matters?

Their next charge refers to a marriage between two,* who scrupled to conform to some practices which this society required, but which they justly considered as unnecessary appendages of superstition; and after due care had been taken to make publication of their intentions to remove all appearance of a clandestine proceeding, they formed a contract of marriage, which they subscribed in the presence of a competent number of witnesses. I believe it will be found that every requisite essential to a covenant of marriage was strictly attended to; but they allege it was contrary to *their well known rules*. This appears to me as an attempt to bind conscience, as if no mode could be right which they did not allow of. But let this society look to the practice of their ancestors, which they sometimes blindly and indiscriminately quote, and I believe they will find this marriage differs very little from what was at *first* practised among them—they dared to differ from the established modes, and I can see no reason that should prevent those of the present or future generations from judging for themselves how much nearer they may approach to true simplicity of manners. Many of the objections urged by the Quakers of this day, were made use of by the opponents of their predecessors, relating to their marriages. I totally disclaim the idea that the institutions of one age should implicitly bind succeeding generations. Each generation, nay, each individual, has a right to judge for themselves. It behoves them to use this right cautiously, and to judge soberly, so that they may not abuse this liberty, and on these conditions of soberly judging, I wish to see free enquiry more generally spread. They allude to my example encouraging one who lived in my family in the station of a servant to attend. I used no influence in this or in any other case to procure attendance. But why make the invidious distinction? Surely servants have as good a right to judge for themselves as any others. There ought to be nothing in their situation; or in our conduct towards them, to cause them to surrender the right of private judgment.

* John Rogers, junior, of Lisburn, and Elizabeth Doyle, then a teacher at the school, near Lisburn.

The society, in its rise, nobly stood against superstition—their successors, in name, are fast treading back again to the point from whence they set out. As to the question, who are the real libertines? let the impartial judge, on a strict comparison of the conduct of each respectively. Many in sundry places are withdrawing from their society, and it is a safe rule to judge by the fruits individually brought forth. By this rule let the conduct of all, both those who secede, and those who publish this paper, be separately tried. We are only accountable for our own actions, and while I disclaim being the apologist for the motives of all who have separated from them, or may hereafter do so, I would say for myself, and for many others, that it is not a false, delusive liberty we are seeking. We only seek to be delivered from the bondage of superstitious observances and formal compliances.

I hasten to quit a subject, wherein I have to speak so much of what may appear as my own personal concerns; and transcribe the words of an ingenious author, who, though writing on a subject widely different, yet expresses thoughts equally applicable to the present occasion.—“The cold immobility of some, the affected indifference of others, the decided contempt of this man, the listless attachment of another to the doctrine of his forefathers, irritated self-love, the hatred of novelties, prejudices of all kinds, all the little passions that creep into society, the pleasantries which they occasion, the sarcasms with which they arm conversation, the ridicule with which they endeavour to cover inventors, the epithet of innovator which is thrown out against them, all this may retard for a few hours, perhaps for a few years, the progress of new ideas. Truth, however, overturns all obstacles, and dreads neither the clamour of envy, nor the resistance of prejudice, nor the opposition of ignorance.”

ON WORSHIP.

MANKIND too often mistake the means for the end, and by so doing turn into an evil, that which otherwise might have been of advantage to them—so it has fared with regard to what goes under the name of worship. The end is to live soberly, righteously and godly; at best the public assembling together can only be the means.

to lead to this end, and yet many have, with contracted views, placed their religion in outward acts, and these being fulfilled, mistakenly supposed that the work was accomplished. I know many who place their religion, some in going to church, and others in going to meeting,—they differ in the mode, and are ready to censure each other for their different practices, and yet are essentially the same; one goes to this place and hears sermons, and the accustomed round of prayers, the other attends a meeting frequently held in silence, and the formalist (a too common character among both) feels not his heart influenced in either, or perhaps mistakes a momentary fervor for true devotion; and having persuaded himself that he has had some good sensations, returns again to his old pursuits, and throws off this affected state of mind with the same ease as he does his best suit of clothes.

Devotion is a dedication of heart, to what we believe to be most acceptable to God, which certainly takes in most comprehensively our duty towards our neighbour—and worship, which is acceptable to God, is that constant habitual state of mind, which seeks to be conformed to the will of God in all things, and in every pursuit of our lives. It is not confined to set times and places, but a true real christian offers worship to God in every good action which he does. He supremely worships God, when in humility he does justly and manifests his love of mercy, not in words, but by deeds. This to be sure is a more difficult attainment than to attend now and then their appointed meetings. I suppose religious association is useful, when it is kept in its subordinate situation, but it has been most grievously abused, and on that account some believe themselves constrained to bear testimony against the abuse, by refraining from the attendance of the usual public assemblies of the various professions.—The worship in spirit and in truth inculcated by Jesus Christ, consists in no outward act, neither in hearing sermons, nor sitting in silence, abstractedly considered in themselves. Assembling publicly together may be useful to stir up one another to good words and works, and hence assumes some appearance of a social duty; but surely it is improperly lowering the idea of spiritual worship to confine it to the outward act, which is no further useful than as it leads forward to the performance of our several duties. Like every outward act, it profiteth nothing—but godliness, a life conformed to the will of God, is profitable in all things; and yet I believe mankind will not be found to be so dependent on one another for instruction as some may suppose. He that will im-
prove

prove must look to resources within himself, to be acquired by meditation and inward retirement; and the acquiring an acquaintance with ourselves, this most useful of all knowledge, must not be confined to set times and places, but occupy the principal attention of the mind, even a considerable part of the time now devoted with eagerness to the sordid desire of making money. He will make but a poor proficiency in attaining the knowledge most essential for him to be acquainted with, who confines his meditations to the time spent in churches and meeting-houses. It has very commonly been objected to reformers in every age, that they were sapping the foundations of religion, because they set forth the inutility of forms, when they came to be depended on as the essence—many having nothing but the form to trust to, were enraged to have this flimsy thread-bare cloak removed; it served in the sight of men to cover their interior state of defect, and they found it more agreeable to their indolence to wrap themselves up in this cloak of seeming decency, than to have their inner garments made clean: thus men found it easier to appear religious, than in reality to be so. I believe it would contribute to the promotion of the cause of godliness, that vice should appear in its genuine naked deformity—it would, it must be allowed, shock us more, but then it would more speedily work its own overthrow. Vice now in many instances imposes on mankind, and retains its ground under the semblance of virtue. The principal current of my public labours for many years has been to unmask hypocrisy, and this raised up a host of opposition against me, particularly among the society to which I belonged; for surely a fair imposing outward shew was too general among many of them. I wish, however, to be understood as speaking with many exceptions. Let us now examine whether unmasking formality tends to injure the interests of religion. I think it has a directly contrary effect. The substituting a strict attention to an inward regulating principle in preference to a sanctimonious appearance only, is freeing it from the impure mixture, by which it has been adulterated. It is not destroying the law, but it is adding a stronger sanction to the fulfilment of every thing that is right; so far from opening a door to libertinism, it most effectually stops its progress. Libertinism, in practice, has in vain been opposed by supposed orthodoxy of sentiment—instead of being repressed it has grown most luxuriantly under this treatment; and I verily believe it never will be eradicated by such means. A crisis is come

on; palliatives will not do. Let us then fairly meet the grievous disorder of libertinism, not by recurring to old forms, this will only tend to increase the danger by disguising it; but let us labour after individual reformation, by attending to the voice of God, that speaks in man through the conscience. This is bringing our deeds to the light, and nothing short of it will effectually help forward the so much wanted work of reformation: until we do thus, all the crying up of forms is only to be compared to the empty noise made by sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. Above all things I desire the furtherance of the work of true righteousness, which, I am thoroughly persuaded, can only be promoted by meeting the growth of evil, by an all-powerful principle which I have now recommended, which alone is able to repress it.

ON CONSCIENCE,

CONSIDERED AS THE GREAT TEACHER, IN PREFERENCE
TO ALL OTHER INSTRUCTION.

CONSCIENCE is the manifestation of the will of God, made in the hearts of all and every one of the children of men—it is through this medium that God speaks intelligibly to the attentive, obedient mind. To become acquainted with its gentle whisperings, it requires a due degree of abstraction from worldly pursuits, and a restraining the tumult of the passions—then the voice of God, or the checks of conscience become intelligible, and are distinctly heard. This is the ray of the divinity in man, and by this means man is formed not corporeally, but mentally after the image of God—by attending to it he is graciously made a partaker of the divine nature: it is called the grace of God, his unspeakable gift—the measure of his spirit given to profit withal, and is described by various figures expressive of its operations—the light, because it makes manifest—the little leaven, which gradually leavens the whole lump—the talent committed to us to occupy with. All nations and countries bear testimony to it under one name or another—the poor untutored Indian admits the good spirit—it whispers peace in his heart, and when he attends to it and obeys it, he does well. I have met with but very few who denied its influence when the matter was properly explained to them—they might indeed
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cavil at some of the terms made use of to describe it, but yet they acknowledged the essential part, when they admitted that they felt that within them which reproved for sin, and which must be of divine origin, because of its powerful effects on the mind. It is adapted to the diversified states and conditions of mankind, it speaks peace for doing well, and most powerfully brings under conviction for doing ill; and if this voice of conscience is unreservedly obeyed, and made the rule of life, mankind would come to be instructed that their faith stands not in any book or outward written testimony, nor in the imputed righteousness of Christ, but in submitting to the operation of this unspeakable gift of God, which manifests itself by its fruits, and produces holiness of life and conversation.

I have made these matters the subject of deep and reverent enquiry; and the more I have examined them, the more my mind has been confirmed in the persuasion, that this doctrine is truth, and is no lie.

Yet, however powerful the operation of conscience is, its voice may be easily drowned amid the tumult of the passions; and men from having shut their ears against it, may bring themselves to disbelieve the reality or sufficiency of such an instructor. But let us only follow in obedience to its instructions—we shall become more familiar with it—those who are faithful in the little become rulers over more. The inveteracy of old established habits also frequently prevents us from seeing some practices and customs to be evil, which really are so.

This principle, holy in itself, has been likewise oftentimes abused; and by imagination, being mistaken for its dictates, enthusiasm has been strengthened. I have known many who have attributed all their own fancies to its leadings, and brought it by such means to be confounded with fanaticism. What has tended much to strengthen this error, is, that many have conceived of this divine principle, by what they have heard from others, instead of being acquainted with its limitations and restrictions for themselves. The cure consequently lies in an acquaintance each for ourselves with its secret intimations; and then I believe many would find the reality differed much from the fancied apprehension of it, which they had received by tradition. But I cannot conceive that any book has a claim to the title of the Word of God. God speaks intelligibly in the hearts of his creatures. What are called the scriptures were written by different men, with different views;

views; and by no means form an uniform whole. If the knowledge of the Scriptures were essentially necessary to doing well, I cannot think so many nations would be left without the knowledge of them. Many parts of them are contradicted by others, so that every sect and all parties have found some things in them to support their ideas, however extravagant they might be. They come into our hands with all the disadvantages of transcribing and translating. And besides, many parts of them are expressed in highly figurative language, liable to be much misunderstood. Let us speak a plain language, without mystery or metaphor. Religion is very simple, let us then simplify the terms: for want of expressing simple truths in simple terms, mistakes of most dangerous tendency have passed from hand to hand, among which I conceive to stand foremost, the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Calling a sinner to awake on these grounds, is like blowing a shrill trumpet to awaken, at the same time that a stupifying draught is given to put them to sleep again; and thus, though a momentary fervor may be raised in such, they shortly sink back into their slumber. They are told they are sinful; but at the same time they are taught to depend on what has been done for them, and not on their own submission and obedience to the operations of grace. I think I am thoroughly sensible of the frailty of human nature, and herein is evidently manifested the goodness of God in giving us a guide through the intricate, thorny paths of the wilderness of this world, that we are not left to grope the way unassisted; the help is offered, but man may refuse or embrace, and it requires a cooperation on our parts to render it effectual. Of the truth of this doctrine I am thoroughly persuaded, and I am not ashamed to publish my sentiments to the world; and though many honest minds may have different opinions, let us not harshly judge one another, but remember that according to the sincerity of the heart, man's acceptance with God stands. Although I think the doctrine which I have hinted at, leads to an unsafe conclusion, I am very far from charging its supporters with improper motives, without discrimination; neither do I throw out these remarks in the spirit of controversy: I submit them to candid observation, and then leave them. I wish to cherish a disposition to hear what any may calmly have to object to my doctrine or conduct; though, at the same time, I would have it understood that I decline entering into any controversial defence
of

of my sentiments ; for it has often happened in such cases, that while the parties have been contending about the exterior of religion, they have lost the very essence of it, *Love to God and man.*

If we only are willing to lead godly lives, we should find that the scriptures were not the pillars of christian faith ; the best parts of them are only like the scaffolding, which, when the building is erected, may be advantageously removed. But the laying so much stress upon them proves to me that the people in a general way are unwilling to come to dig to the foundation for themselves : the revelation of the will of God in the heart, on which foundation a building of holiness of life can be erected ; every other building is only on the sand, and in the day of trial will fall, and great will be the fall thereof. Because the people have not built upon this rock, on which purity of manners can only be established, it has happened that many have, in the season of trial, fallen into real infidelity, and a still greater number, while they wish to retain the form of godliness, are denying its power. But it is necessary to discriminate between that infidelity or spirit of unbelief which leads into laxity of practice, and the cry of infidel which is raised against those who, from pure conscientious motives, cannot join with the traditionally received opinions of the multitude ; many of whom join the popular cry of “ Great is Diana of the Ephesians ; ” while the greater number know not for what purpose they are come together : and I know of none more ready to raise a clamour, than those who have nothing of religion but the form. Yet it is far from my intention to involve in an indiscriminate censure all, who may be alarmed at my sentiments. I have no doubt but many honest minds are frightened. I feel much for these ; and if I could, I would wish to avoid giving such offence ; but in the cause of what I believe to be truth, I dare not but speak out. Let me advise such honest minds to keep cool, and guard against being inflamed either by their own prejudices, or the prejudices of others ; and in due time, perhaps, some of them may see cause to be less alarmed.

My mind is sorrowfully affected with the prevailing degeneracy of the people in every rank and condition of life, and the more I see of the present state of the world, I am more fully confirmed in this apprehension, so painful to a feeling mind. This state of depravity has grown up, flourished and encreased under the appearance of a high profession. I fear that too much stress has been

laid on forms, and on a supposed soundness of belief, and therefore I believe the remedy will lie in recurring to that sound principle of conscience implanted in the heart, which leads to true morality or (in other words) to purity of life and manners. The evil has arisen by departing from this principle, and substituting belief instead of practice, and the only way to remove it and the hurtful consequences which have arisen, must be in coming back again to soundness of practice; then would men be instructed to see their duty in a more extensive point of view, than many have hitherto conceived of it; that their duty towards God lay much deeper than a bare assent to creeds and systems, and their duty towards their neighbour took in a more extensive circle of obligation, than what at present appears to be comprehended by the deficient morality which passes current in the world.

It is very necessary for the professors of christianity seriously to enquire, what their profession has done for them? Have they not as much vice among them as those nations whom they style infidels? The vices more immediately belonging to civilized life, and the vices of savage life, differ in appearance; but I fear the total amount is great in both; the nations calling themselves christians stand, indeed, greatly in need of reformation.

My aim is to point out conscience as a guide for actions, and especially to endeavour to turn the attention of the people more to sound practice, than to speculative traditional opinions. But I feel myself unequal to the task of defining to others, to the full extent, my ideas of conscience—these are better felt than expressed; and it is to individual feeling I wish to direct: yet I desire to avoid expressing myself in any way which may look like mysticism. Objections have been raised against conscience, because some suppose its efforts have been ill directed, as many plead conscience for various practices, which others allege conscience to excuse them from: thus, they say, conscience varies in different persons. I attribute this rather to our allowing erroneous sentiments and notions to mix with conscience, which is pure in itself; and besides, by conscience we may judge more particularly of our actions than of opinions; the latter may require a further effort of the mind to develope. I perceive the difficulty of attempting to speak clearly to the very different apprehensions of those who may read this little work—our faces do not differ more from each other, than the complexion of our minds, which
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take their colour from surrounding circumstances ; and language which may appear familiar to one class of readers, may not be understood by others. Sects differ much from each other in their peculiar phrases, and the terms of expression of one society frequently are as unintelligible to others, as the language of a different country may be to its neighbouring nations. I therefore express my ideas, I trust, with becoming diffidence and humility, requesting my readers to examine, and judge for themselves. A French writer aptly says, " Conscience is more to be depended on in these cases than science. Every one is obliged to seek truth for his own good and prosperity : he would otherwise become covetous, ambitious, wicked, superstitious, and even a cannibal, according to the prejudices and interests of those entrusted with his education : this search after truth is to be done by the means of a simple heart : the senses and understanding may err ; but a simple heart, though it may be deceived, never deceives : it never feigns to understand what it does not understand, nor to believe what it does not believe : it does not assist to deceive itself, nor afterwards to deceive others. Thus, a simple heart, far from being weak, like those of the greater part of mankind seduced by their own interest, is strong, and such as is required in the search after, and preservation of truth. Truth may be compared to the dew of heaven ; to preserve it pure, it must be collected in a pure vessel."

ON SIMPLICITY OF MANNERS.

I am aware of the difficulty of attending to what may be considered the lesser matters, and at the same time not attributing too much consequence to them. Religion consists not in the cut or colour of a coat, or in external dress, merely considered in itself ; and yet simplicity is agreeable.—Clothes are for use, and not for shew ; and a vain mind is gratified by the observance of the fleeting and varying fashions of the times. So likewise with regard to modes of speech—it may be well to look at the origin of customs to see the impropriety of supporting them. Addressing with titles of honour, and using the plural number

instead of the singular, originated in flattery and pride; and there appears to me a glaring absurdity in calling the months and the days of the week by the commonly received names—the numerical order is more simple, and the adopting of this mode was a stand against the many-headed monster, Superstition. For their rational singularity in these respects, the first Quakers were the objects of much ridicule. I am satisfied many acted on pure motives in their opposition to absurd practices; but what contributed in some measure to bring an adherence to these scruples into disrepute was, because many of their successors were stiff in these outward matters, while they neglected more essential things: these things ought they to have done, and not left the others undone; and a scrupulous attention to the smaller matters while the greater are neglected, is hurtful to the persons who act so, and becomes truly ridiculous in the view of others, who are desirous to examine into things closely and not superficially. I wish the narrow distinctions of sects to cease, and that difference of manners may no longer be the badge of a party; but that all our customs and practices may be brought to the test of rationality—then would reformation and genuine simplicity of manners prevail, both in the greater and lesser duties of life.

ON WAR,

AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISCORD IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE—A REMEDY PROPOSED.

BY many of the hot zealots of the day I suppose I am reckoned deficient in christian belief, because I cannot bring my views to their narrow system. On the present subject it is probable I may be thought to believe too much. But I am content; this is a subject of which the disapprobation or abhorrence is closely connected with the christian virtues. Let others wrap themselves up in the lazy belief of a system; for myself, I had rather be practically religious, than appear to be so only in speculation. War has been encouraged and promoted for ages by most professing christians, and yet I firmly believe that wars in every age have been contrary to the divine law of God revealed

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in the heart of man; but the bias of education and example, and strong deep-rooted prejudices have prevailed to strengthen the evil passions to carry on this horrid trade.

The history of the Jewish wars as recorded in the Bible, and implicitly believed to have been undertaken by divine command, has contributed its share to the continuance of this evil. I wish to clear religion from this reproach, and I again repeat my firm persuasion that God never commanded these or any other wars to be carried on. To particularize all the instances of atrocity perpetrated by the Jews in their wars, and said to be sanctioned by divine command, would be tedious and unnecessary in the present place; but just to mention one:—I cannot believe that God ever inspired that war-song, wherein Jael the wife of Heber is pronounced blessed above women for an act of treachery and cruelty; see Judges, chap. 4 and 5. What would be our feelings to read such an account in any other book? Yet the Bible cannot sanction error, or change the nature of right and wrong. What is now cruel and treacherous was so always. There can be no change of dispensations to make that a virtue in one age, or in one country, which would be a crime in the present day. The opposite natures of vice and virtue are immutable. To me it is most shocking that what is called religion, has lent its aid to sanction such deeds. We have even had wars called religious ones, as if religion could be supported by what is so contrary to itself; for religion, if it were attended to, would cause wars to cease, even to the remotest corners of the earth. A very slight partition divides between offensive and defensive wars. I can perceive but little difference; for when war is begun, they so often change sides in offence and defence, that no side can lay just claim to the confining themselves exclusively to defence.

That cannot be good, which has a tendency to produce so much evil, and it is impossible to carry on a state of warfare, without violating, in an eminent degree, the christian virtues. It brings every vice, robbery, murder, and lust in its train, and is destructive of the mild and genuine characteristics of true religion, meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness of injuries. We can scarcely picture to ourselves a more dreadful scene than the march of a victorious army, or the retreat of a defeated one. This scene, when viewed by a feeling mind, cannot fail to move the heart; but I am afraid,

that with many who hear of it only at a distance, their horror at its enormity is lessened; and while they sleep in security themselves, their self-love causes them to be indifferent to the sufferings of others, or even to approve of them, if by such means their own interest is apparently promoted. Thus, the spirit of war gains strength in theory, and the mind being vitiated by erroneous sentiment, is ready to practice; which causes many to act in this dreadful business, when opportunities and circumstances bring them into situations of temptation to action. Step follows step, and as the ascent to virtue is progressive, so likewise is the descent to error. In this case erroneous sentiment powerfully strengthens in wrong practice.

War has had its advocates, among all classes. Poets have celebrated it with mistaken and misapplied praises; and philosophers have attempted to varnish over its deformity, by specious yet false reasonings. History, as well that of the Jews as of every other nation, has been little more than the annals of blood, and the records of crimes. Those styling themselves ministers of the gospel, in many instances have lent their aid, and joined the confederacy against peace. I also believe many honest minds, partly through fear of doing wrong, and in part from an unwarrantable timidity, have hesitated to examine into these things for themselves. They were afraid to examine into the validity of scripture; and to get rid of some glaring inconsistencies which stared them in the face, they bewildered themselves with confused ideas of a change of dispensations.

I have for several years firmly held the sentiments which I now express; but I was restrained by various motives from publishing them so fully. I dare no longer keep silence, but feel it a duty which I peculiarly owe to mankind, at whatever risque, to offer to their consideration the result of my serious enquiry. I believe all resistance in private life to endanger the life of a fellow man unjustifiable, and I know of no object to be possessed in this world, property, liberty, and even life itself, but what would be too dearly purchased at the expence of war, or the destruction of our fellows singly, or in greater numbers. If we cannot keep those things by quiet and peaceable means, it is the business of a christian to submit, and patiently to suffer—it is better to suffer wrong, than to do wrong—and although this disposition by many would be called cowardly and mean-spirited; yet I am convinced more
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true fortitude is discovered by patiently enduring, than by resenting injuries. The victory over our own passions is the only one worth the attaining; and besides, when the mind is brought into this disposition to bear and to forbear, I believe oftentimes many means of escape from the threatening dangers, are providentially opened—gentleness frequently disarms fierceness: and even though we may be more closely tried, in the greatest extremities, a strength of mind may be acquired through the exercise of resignation, which enables to bear up under the severest trials.

War is a compound of every species of evil; how deficient then must be that system of religion and morality which sanctions it? It in a peculiar manner stirs up the angry passions; for my part, I cannot suppose any one to be under the influence of a mind, similar to what was in Jesus Christ, who could slay his fellow on any account. It is contrary to the doctrine he always taught. I have heard of some who, while they were destroying their brethren of the human race, boasted highly of their christian raptures; these men, however sincere their intentions might be, I can consider in no other light, than under a delusion, and carried away by the warmth of their passions. Many miscall their passions by the name of virtues. Oh! the crimes of wars! I shudder at the recollection of the horrors attendant on a state of warfare, where all the evil passions are let loose, and where commonly both sides are equally guilty. Ah! poor man, what miseries dost thou bring upon thyself, and upon thy fellow men, by giving way to thy evil passions, in direct opposition to the gentle intimations of the voice of God in thine heart, pleading with thee to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly! I have attempted slightly to sketch the evils, the dreadful evils man brings upon himself in public life, by his disregard to this secret monitor: but when my attention is turned again to private life, when I behold the feuds and quarrels in the lesser circles of neighbourhoods, and families, my heart bleeds afresh for the manifold miseries under various shapes, we bring upon ourselves. This state of misery is assuredly not of God's ordering. We fall into it through the abuse of our free agency which is left to us, that we may, by having the liberty of choice, be justly accountable for our choice. I have pointed out some of the mighty evils which we behold so widely overspreading the fair face of the earth; but where shall we look for a remedy? These things have

come upon us, because many placed their religion only in belief, in opinion; with many it evaporated in fine sentiment—now in the opposite conduct we must look for the remedy. It is not what a man thinks, but how he acts, which renders him acceptable to God; and it is by a close attention to his law of justice, mercy, and peace, that we can be redeemed from this corrupt state, and know salvation from sin. In the heart of man, the evils had their origin by his disobeying this pure law—and in the heart we must look for the remedy. Be conversant with thyself; know thy own frailties; study to find out thy own wrong biases; be sufficiently humble to admit thy weaknesses; and then watch and guard carefully against them. Attend to the voice of truth which speaks within, and may truly be said to speak from heaven, then many things would be shewn to thee to be wrong, which thou thoughtst but little of before, or perhaps esteemedst innocent and harmless, and even some of them praise-worthy. Sin, then, would become exceedingly sinful in thy view; thou wouldst then strive against it, not in the feeble drowsy manner of the formalist, but with all thy might; thou wouldst let no action of thy life escape close investigation; thou wouldst impartially examine the motives of thy conduct, which, without this close inspection, would often elude thy own observation: then thou wouldst perceive war in every shape to be unlawful, and avoid the miseries of private life, by subduing thy passions and regulating thy will by the standard of rectitude. Thou wouldst discharge thy several social and relative duties with propriety; this is what would make us in our several stations good, tender fathers, obedient, teachable children; masters and servants faithfully discharging their duties to each other. This would reconcile the seemingly jarring interests of rich and poor; and in short, gradually introduce, as individual reformation is experienced, the rule of peace and righteousness in the earth. The views of mankind would not be turned to look for the outward coming of Christ, with the pomp of martial display, as some suppose, but the kingdom of heaven, the rule of righteousness and peace would be sought and found in the heart individually. In this state the import of Christ's prayer would be truly known, and experimentally found to differ much from the unfeeling repetition of it so common in the mouths of many, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven!" Then surely wars and discord would cease both in
public

public and private life. We need not look to a distance for the coming of this time, it is nigh thee in thy heart, and if thou obeyest its rule, thou mayst witness it to be already come, producing righteousness and its attendants, Joy and Peace. The obedience to this power, with the practical experience of its operation, is that only which I can account to be true and undefiled religion, and no man is any farther religious than he is acquainted with it; and I charitably trust that many do know of its power, who under various and differing forms are entangled with the hand-writing of ordinances and the mists of a wide overspreading superstition. But this experimental and effective religion will stand, when all these mists shall be driven away, and the spacious buildings erected on the sandy foundation of error shall be thrown down, and their places remembered no more.

I now draw to a conclusion.—In this publication, as well as in my former ‘Reasons,’ I have wished to be as brief as I could. I have not studied systematic arrangement, but followed the train of thought as it arose in my mind, without endeavouring to cramp it by frigid rule. I throw out hints rather to induce others to think, than to enforce my sentiments; for I have no disposition to intrude my thoughts on any.

Let the many judge of my writings as they please. I rest satisfied with a consciousness of the honesty of my intentions; my mind is supported by an internal sense of approbation, for having ventured to speak out; I am not dismayed by clamour, from freely expressing my sentiments—and in so doing I rejoice that I have preferred the testimony of a good conscience to the favour and approbation of men: and, however some may hesitate, or refuse to allow me to be a christian, I am not moved thereby. If I cannot stretch my belief to their standard, I wish to square my conduct by christian practice; and under present feelings, I can truly say, I love all men, and feel a disposition, which as far as opportunity may offer, I trust, would be willing to do good to those, who revile and speak evil of me.

I have no disposition to promote a spirit of floating speculation without practice. I recommend to others, and I wish to follow the advice myself, to attend very strictly to conduct. Let us lay the foundation in endeavouring to act well, and then we need not fear to examine soberly with the greatest freedom. It is conscience, or a sense of wrong conduct which makes cowards,
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and causes many to catch at supposed orthodoxy of sentiment, to make up for their wrong conduct. Yet I fully believe, light and truth will spread in the earth, and in this hope I feel consolation amid the trials and exercises of the present times.

I have seen two publications intended as answers to my former pamphlet—One appeared some time ago, without a name; but it was not on account of its being anonymous, that I have passed it unnoticed. I intermeddle not in controversy.—Since I concluded the foregoing pages, I have this evening seen another, signed, *Samuel Tucker*.—I make no further reply.

The cause of CALM, RATIONAL ENQUIRY is not supported by the *biting invectives* of an *acrimonious reply*; neither would it be aided if I made a rejoinder in the same spirit.

My two pamphlets, and the replies to the former one, are now before the public—let the impartial weigh, examine, and judge for themselves. I submit my sentiments to sober investigation. TRUE RELIGION consists not in the *fancied conversion of an hour*; but in the general tenor of a well regulated life. Hasty impressions are seldom lasting, but are often as hastily defaced; and thus the heart is left destitute of sound principles of action.

Lisburn, 28th of 8th month, 1801.

THOUGHTS ON MUSIC,

AND A CONFORMITY TO THE CUSTOMS OF THE TIMES.

I HAVE believed it right for me to separate myself from all sects, and I trust I am not disposed to view matters on a sectarian plan; and yet in separating from an outward society, I am desirous to steer clear of a prejudice, which might lead me to reject any scruple merely because it was the practice of the people from whom I have separated. I wish to try and examine for myself, and to bring every thing to the test of sound reason, neither adopting because it is practised by others, nor rejecting because those who err in many things, may have adopted that
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which is proper and right in other cases. I think I have perceived a risque on this hand, lest some in seeing the dangers of formality, may incline to the errors of an undue liberty—I therefore offer my sentiments on these subjects to serious consideration, and as one earnestly desirous of the real interests of all, submit this cautionary address to warn, where I think there is a likelihood of danger arising. If we act in a proper spirit, I believe we may be thus helpful to one another, by pointing out where danger lies.

I most earnestly desire that in the present separating from fallen churches we may throughout act on sound principles, and manifest that we are not seeking any undue liberty. I am well convinced that this is the ground on which several of those have acted in divers places, who have lately withdrawn from the Quaker society.

Music appears to me to be attended with many snares—it in my view has an evident tendency to enervate the mind—the time employed to learn it, might be applied to procure more useful knowledge: I wish the instruction of youth to be directed to the purpose of calling out the latent energies of the mind, to strengthen rather than to enfeeble; the latter, I fear, may be a probable consequence of a taste for music. It operates on the passions, and rousing the passions tends to weaken the powers of reason. Music sometimes is employed to incite to war, and at other times to promote a light, airy disposition; in both instances having a tendency opposite to the spirit of genuine religion. That it has a hurtful effect on the mind, I appeal to the conduct of many of those who follow it for a profession. It may not have so hurtful an effect, where it is not so closely followed; but it is dangerous to meddle with poison, even in very small doses. It is said to have its origin in nature; for my part, I only consider it as the mimicry of nature; and besides, if it even possessed more of nature than I conceive it does, the following after nature requires to be corrected by grace—many things may be according to nature, in which it is not expedient to indulge, for the true use of nature must be circumscribed by the law of grace: by attention to this divine law we shall be led to self denial; this most powerfully strengthens the mind, and leads forward those who submit to its salutary restraints in the path of rectitude. I am not of a gloomy cast of mind,
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I neither wish to practise moroseness myself, nor to recommend it to others; but I firmly believe, that it is on the basis of self-denial that the christian virtues must be built. If we are not careful to keep the principle of self-denial in view, we may run into practices equally wrong with the formalities from which we have separated. In attempting to free ourselves from the trammels of sects, before we assimilate to the usages and manners of the present day, let us first carefully examine, whether they are founded in rationality, otherwise, we may blindly adopt very inconsistent practices.

I think the Quakers erred in being exact in some outward matters, while they neglected, in too general a way, the more essential duties; hence arose their stiff formality. Let us, however, rather look at the ground and origin of these matters, than at the manner in which this people supported them. It would be a want of true liberality, in an over eager desire to get rid of sectarian distinctions, to avoid following practices right in themselves, because others had used them, and in some instances had abused them. Though the cut and colour of a coat be immaterial, simplicity in dress, and avoiding a compliance with the ever-fleeting fashions of the times, are things right in themselves, independent of all other considerations. The common mode of speech is very corrupt—to adopt names for the months and the days of the week, from the exploded superstitions of former times, appears absurd. What can be more simple and agreeable than to call them first, second, &c.? The giving the titles commonly used in speaking and writing is contributing our support to nourishing aristocratic pride, and continuing a corrupt custom. Let us seriously examine whether going back again to former superstitions will have a profitable tendency to pull down the mighty mass of superstition? Or how will adopting practices wrong in themselves in conformity to the customs of the world, be useful in advancing the work of reformation? I speak it with regret, but I fear the customs and the morals of the many in every rank and situation in these countries are very corrupt; and I am led to this painful conclusion by a close attention, joined with a pretty general knowledge of them. I lament that I have to say so; but such, I believe, is their real situation. I love my fellow men, but I believe the way for me to contribute my mite towards the work of reformation, is not to join with them in their various errors, but to
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point out the dangers on the right hand and on the left. A conscientious mind cannot confederate with wrong; it would sully the purity of such who should do so, and be hurtful to those with whom they might join, by strengthening them in their improper habits.

I recommend a close attention to the restraints of a necessary self-denial; without a watchful care on this hand, many will be in great danger, and may suffer much loss, yet through all I fully believe the work of reformation will advance. Being of no sect, neither old or new, I do not feel myself accountable for the conduct of others, nor are others accountable for my conduct; we must stand or fall by our own acts. Each is to be judged by the fruits brought forth individually. But I feel it a duty to let my thoughts be publicly known on these subjects.

To pass through the present awful crisis with safety to ourselves, and some little degree of usefulness to others; it requires close, watchful attention. We had need carefully to examine on every side; for some things viewed only on one side may appear plausible, but when closely looked at all round may then be seen to be very contrary from what we at first took them to be. It is necessary to examine men and things very narrowly, and from this close investigation to form our judgments, and deduce sound principles of action to regulate our own conduct. In my own particular, I am equally desirous to avoid right hand errors and left-hand errors; the path of rectitude has the dangers of formality and hypocrisy on one hand, and of libertinism on the other. Let us examine with deliberation, and act with firmness; and this is the way to leave the example of a steady, consistent conduct: for the natural result of taking up matters hastily and lightly, in speculation, causes a deficiency of proper firmness in conduct. I greatly dislike an austere, harsh demeanour, and yet in reviewing the general character of the present age, I fear it is wanting in firmness and energy.—This is one of the bad effects of the old system, which had so great a tendency to enervate by keeping in the trammels of superstition, and preventing the mind from rightly expanding, so that when this restraint is hastily taken off, there is a danger for want of being formed to a solid energy of character, of running into some extravagancies. This, however, may be guarded against by circumspect deliberation; and this caution will be found absolutely necessary to enable us to
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act with propriety in the present awful and momentous period. To labour after a well regulated conduct in every particular, strengthens the mind to come up in the proper discharge of the circle of our various duties; and qualifies to examine and detect, with boldness and firmness, the many errors that so evidently appear in the different systems of what passes for religion in the world. A consistent, firm conduct, formed on the basis of self-denial, is in my apprehension a sure preservative and protection to the mind in the search after truth, and shields from the various dangers to which otherwise this necessary investigation would be exposed.

Lisburn : 9th of 10th month, 1801.

A

FRIENDLY EXPOSTULATION,

ADDRESSED TO

THE PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS.

THE Author, in penning the ensuing address, has particularly in view, the members of this society in Ireland, with whom he has more intimate knowledge, arising from long personal acquaintance. But, as probably these pages may be perused by some in Britain as well as in America, he suggests the idea, that many of the observations being of a general tendency, will be found equally applicable to the state of this society in these countries. He is further strengthened in this opinion from the little acquaintance he has had in England, and from opportunities he obtained of examining the characters of some, who came from the other side of the Atlantic.

The ensuing pages are more particularly relative to those, who are, or have been members of this society, to whom the account of some particular customs or usages may be more intelligible—yet it is presumed that other readers may find some interesting circumstances mentioned, which may tend to general utility.

Lisburn: 28th of 2d mo. 1802.

FRIENDLY EXPOSTULATION,

&c.

I Have already in two publications * freely assigned my reasons for separating myself from your society. I thought it was a duty, which I owed to the public at large, explicitly to state my sentiments on sundry important subjects. An interval has since occurred; spent mostly in calm retirement, in which I have often seriously meditated on the subjects, and I find my mind fully confirmed with regard to the rectitude of the steps which I have taken. Nothing which has passed in my own mind, the conversations which I have heard, or the perusal of the controversial pieces, to which my former publications gave rise, have caused me to change the sentiments that I then expressed.

I feel a desire to address you in this manner. With regard to many, I expect it will be altogether unavailing, yet there are innocent minds, some of them much tinctured with prejudice, on whose behalf I am deeply interested. I wish their eyes to be opened, that they may see for themselves; and on their account principally am I engaged to make this friendly expostulation.

In looking over the society, I divide them into several classes. Of each respectively, I may say a few words. Some honest minds, long in the habit of going on in the accustomed track, without much deep reflection, are alarmed; they are timid, and afraid to venture to let in a doubt of the infallibility of their little system, and round of performances. They go to meetings regularly at home, and frequently venture to leave their worldly concerns to attend their general meetings abroad. They engage

* 1. Reasons for withdrawing from Society with the People called Quakers.

2. Additional Observations.

in what is called church discipline : and these acts being accomplished, they are ready to think they have fulfilled the whole duty of a christian. I doubt not but many of them have much sincerity, and in proportion as that prevails in their minds, they will find acceptance in the divine sight. But many of these inordinately love the world, and consequently do not sufficiently bear the stamp of men of God, hating covetousness. Some have been asleep in the day of ease, and drawing much of their consolations from the things of this world. They have been suddenly awaked by the cry which has been set up against innovation*, and without staying seriously to enquire for themselves, whether that was really the side, on which danger was to be apprehended, they hastily arose like men out of a dream, and joined in the general tumult against every thing which they considered as new. If they had been possessed of clear vision, I think they would have discovered, that luke-warmness and a worldly spirit were greater enemies to the cause of righteousness, than this so much dreaded reformation being pushed too far. I am grieved on account of many of you. Some of you were willing to go a certain length in the cause of reform ; but what did hinder you ? Having made a beginning in the spirit, why sought you to be made perfect in the flesh ? There once was a time, when we could have taken sweet counsel together. Some of us believed ourselves called upon to go forward—you stopped short—this caused a separation. I feel my mind covered with much love and affection to the sincere-hearted in this class.

I now come to address myself to a description of members of the society, respecting whom I have much solicitude, to some thoughtful, liberal-minded persons, particularly among the youth. While I have hopes of some of these gaining a firm establishment in righteousness, I have also my anxious fears. I am afraid of you being gradually leavened into the spirit of the world : this would enfeeble you, and produce sensations opposite to true christian courage. I fear some of you have already suffered loss in this respect, and are in great danger of still suffering greater. Receive the word of warning ; love not the world, nor let yourselves be degraded to mere machines for making gain. Some urge the

* Job Scott was known frequently to declare this certain truth, that " without innovation there never would be renovation : " a sentiment undoubtedly true in the late and present state of your society.

advantages of industry, and allege it preserves from some evils attendant on idleness ; and the fond hope is sometimes indulged in youthful minds not yet hackneyed in the ways of men, that if they gain money, they will usefully employ it in plans for assisting in improving the situation of many of their fellow men. I am no advocate for idleness, but believe active employment to be useful to the mind of man ; but there are many ways of active usefulness to ourselves and others, without having our minds almost totally absorbed in considerations how to make money ; and we often find it to be the case, that many who are successful in this pursuit, with accumulated property, lose the generous sensations of their youth, with regard to their intended liberal application of it to useful ends ; and thus, only the sordid desire of gain remains, while their finer feelings evaporate. Such is, I think, a just picture of the mind of man, which should teach us a profitable distrust of ourselves, never to do that which on narrow scrutiny may be found to be evil, that good may come of it. Success has often spoiled the open, ingenuous feelings of youth ; and young people of liberal minds have gradually in the course of successive years become contracted and narrow-hearted, in the middle time of manhood, and in their declining years. Look around you, examples of this kind every where abound ; let the harms of others teach you to beware. I expect many of those whose conduct you now reprobate as bigots and as worldlings, (two characters often united in the same person) were in the days of their youth possessed of the same amiable sensibility, which you now have, until it was gradually rubbed off by their intercourse with the world, and an unfeeling disposition engendered by its corrupting influence.

Many others of the youth are going great lengths into libertinism, and running heedlessly on in the paths of folly ; I pity, and lament over the state of such ; they have had an evil example in many of their elders, and some of their parents, who, though they have outgrown by years some of the follies most incident to youth, are yet shewing the children an evil example in their worldly-mindedness, and lifeless formality. Such may be said not to have grown wiser by years, but to have exchanged the follies of youth for the more sober, but not less pernicious errors of advancing years. I wish to say nothing in the smallest degree to encourage thoughtless dissipation ; but I believe myself called upon zealously to testify against the equally destructive evils of
formality

formality and hypocrisy, which are to be seen often under a plain garb among many who are austere condemners of the youth. Yet let the youth seriously consider that the manifest errors of others will be no justification for their wrong conduct—we are each individually accountable for ourselves.

I have observed many among this libertine class of the youth, warm supporters of the forms and outward observances of the society; a character which I call by the name of *the libertine formalist*, is not unfrequently met with in the present day; and some appear to reckon pretty much on their support to what they consider the good old cause. It shews to me, however, that libertines find room enough in your system, while the exercised christian, like his great pattern, finds not room to lay his head, though the foxes have their holes, and the birds of the air their nests among you.

I have already alluded to the great injury (I may say greater injury than what arises from the libertine) done by the pernicious example of the formal professor, a character which abounds so much among you, and which I think your system has a great tendency to produce, by many laying too much stress on outward matters, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law of truth and of justice. Some of these have now stepped forward in some places, where others have withdrawn from you, into situations of greater activity among you; and in this they have been encouraged by some of sincere minds from the mistaken view, that what is called the discipline of the church, must be supported by any, however ill qualified, rather than not at all. This will, I think, be likely to accelerate the downfall of the society, and introduce still greater degrees of corruption and putrefaction among you. Conspicuous stations will not qualify those who are thrust into them—indeed I have long thought the manner in which the discipline was conducted, had a powerful tendency to nourish in individuals spiritual pride, through injudiciously putting forward weak and improper persons into offices and appointments they were not qualified for; and by this means in the exercise of your discipline, the root of pride was nourished in a degree which many sincere minds who were active in it, did not at all perceive; because their minds were blinded through prejudice in favour of long-established practices, of which they were afraid to examine the foundations for themselves. Individuals were hurt, and the cause of truth injured through inju-

dicious nominations, and the consequent lifeless administration of your law.

I have now gone through the sketch which I proposed, of what I conceive to be the general state of the society at present : by some I shall doubtless be blamed for harshness, and in the hackneyed phrase of the day, a want of charity. As to such it may be needless to attempt to remove their fixed sentiment ; but I trust there are some who will credit my assertion, when I tell them that I am conscious of being influenced by no other consideration, than sincere good will to all, and my only motive for speaking out so plainly is, because I think it will promote the cause of truth, to point out errors, let them appear in whom they may ; yet while I point out the offence, I feel love and true compassion for the offender. I only use strong expressions, because I believe the cause of truth requires plain dealing without dissimulation to be used towards all. In desperate cases, it is the act of a true friend to take upon him the unwelcome task of warning faithfully of the imminent danger.

Before I proceed to the remaining part of what lies before me, to point out the departure of the society from the truly christian foundation on which the early members of it set out, I am desirous to take this opportunity of addressing a few words to those, who, with myself, have separated from its communion. We stand in an awful, critical situation. We have renounced outward bonds of communion. Let us manifest by a watchful attention to the regulation of our minds, that while we reject the trammels of human system, we are seeking something better to restrain the impulses of our passions. We know human rules cannot reach to the inward regulation of the heart ; and I earnestly wish that while we are laying aside the broken reed of dependence on outward rule, we may become more obedient to the law written in the heart. Let us then struggle with earnestness after a full subjection of our wills to the divine will, for otherwise it would be only changing one empty form for a situation equally as unprofitable to ourselves ; and instead of leaving some useful way-marks for those who may come after us, we should only through want of care fall ourselves, and lie as stumbling blocks in the way of our successors. There is great need of watchfulness, lest the dead fly should incautiously be mixed up in the ointment of the apothecary, causing it to send forth a stinking savour. But let it happen as it may with us as
indi-

individuals, if we fall, it will be through our own fault, yet I believe many in the succeeding and future generations, will have to walk in this same path, in which some of us have had to walk, as solitary despised pilgrims: yea, I assuredly believe, that some who come after us, will carry on this glorious work of reformation, now feebly begun; the day is dawned, and the sun of Truth will arise and dispel the clouds of bigotry, superstition and idolatry, now, alas! presenting so thick a gloom over all the countries of the earth.

Some, perhaps, may be startled at my applying the term, Idolatry, in so extensive a sense. To be plain, I think there is too much of idolatry in what is called the christian world, and that among every sect. Idolatry was an attempt to worship God, the source and fountain of all intelligence, under visible forms, or representations. This I take to be the foundation of idolatry in the heathen world. They made likenesses to represent God; and from this wrong source, it appears to have degenerated into still more gross instances of their worshipping animals and men as gods.

Let professing christians of every sect consider, whether they are not idolizing their respective forms. They first set up these forms, as means to lead the mind to God. They then subtract the honour due to God, and transfer it to these forms, the work of their own hands. I think images, the long catalogue of saints (so called), baptism, ordinations, and ceremonies in general, may be referred to this cause. Some sects may exclaim, they are free from this charge; but before they acquit themselves through partial views in their own favour; let them consider how tenaciously attached they are to their own forms and acts of outward performance. I fear a dependance on outward rule leads many to think they have sufficiently done their duty in performing their accustomed rounds of formality; and causes them to be careless of their great duties to God. This is robbing God of his honour, and bowing down to graven images. I hesitate not to call it idolatry. Far, however, be it from me to suppose, but that many practise these things innocently in the sincerity of their hearts; they err through ignorance, for want of closely examining.

I often am engaged in considering the solid foundation laid by the early members of this society. It is not to be expected that they could erect the entire building themselves; but they did

much—they laid the foundation ; but, alas ! their successors in a general way did not build on it. Many of them joined hands with the world—and why are the Quakers in the present day more in favour with the indiscriminating many, but because they are so generally one with them in their worldly pursuits ? I have often heard the Quakers highly extolled, but principally for their industry, (often another name for the sordid desire of gain) and their possessing much of this world's treasure. The world “loveth its own,” and from this source, I fear, often arises that undistinguishing praise bestowed upon them ; many of them have not the truly praise-worthy character of being eminent examples of that distinguishing mark of a christian, self-denial.

The society has latterly by some of their public acts appeared to come to the judgment, that an implicit belief in the scriptures was necessary ; for my part, I can consider them in no other light than as a mixed compilation of good and evil—some parts of them are most excellent, and other parts of them, I am well assured, have contributed much to continue many most dangerous errors. What is called the Old Testament, abounds with precepts and examples for wars, which were said to be carried on by divine command, and with divine assistance. These records even go so far as to represent God a partaker in them. Now I must consider there is an essential difference between the operations of an earthquake, fire, or other natural means, and the destruction occasioned by the sword ; because, in the latter case, man is made an agent, and his evil passions must be stirred up before he can engage in war. I cannot suppose God to lead any into temptation or evil. Some in speaking on this subject, talk of the sword as if it were of the same nature with earthquakes, &c. without considering in the latter case, that it is man, a being accountable for his conduct, who wields this fatal implement of destruction against his fellow men ; and talking of a change of dispensations, does not by any means get rid of this difficulty. Can we suppose God to have changed the immutable laws of justice and truth ? In one age to have ordered wars, massacres, and the most horrid acts, and in another age to prohibit the use of the sword ? Moreover, I think there is sufficient grounds in parts of the scriptures for several doctrines, which the society in the first rise bore testimony against, as baptism, what is called the Lord's supper, anointing the sick with oil, &c.

I think

I think it will be found by careful examination, that the writers referred to in the note *, really meant to support these doctrines taken in a literal sense ; and I think it is unfair to torture their expressions by attempting to allegorize them. I think we have no right to bring their meaning to suit the sense we please to put on them. Let us rather candidly admit that these men were subject to like passions with others, and saw many things but as through a glass faintly. But how acted George Fox and others in his day? They nobly broke through the fetters, and declared wars to be unlawful, and baptism and such like outward observances to be useless incumbrances on real religion, though these practices were certainly countenanced by some of the apostles, who did not see clearly into all things at once ; for the operation of light or divine truth has always been found to be progressive in the minds of individuals, and of consequence also its spread in the earth has been progressive—the successors of the apostles, and again their successors still farther elapsed into darkness, and in this situation eagerly caught at those ceremonies, and turned them to their own temporal advantage, by making them a principal foundation of priestcraft, and deriving their gain from this quarter ; besides, it has always been found easier to observe the hand-writing of ceremonial ordinances, than to fulfil the great duties of the law of justice, mercy, and truth. I apprehend that it was by this very means that most of the mighty evils of superstition crept in, and have interwoven themselves into the very

* Acts x. chap. 47.—Acts viii, 37 and 38 (for baptism).—I Cor. xi. chap. In the beginning of this chapter are some unintelligible observations respecting wearing the hair, the superiority of man to woman : and in the latter part, Paul gives directions how what he terms the Lord's supper should be eaten.

Paul in I Cor. I. 14, 15, and 16, acknowledges his having baptized some, though not many, which yet shews he had practised this rite.

Anointing the sick with oil is countenanced by James, v. chap. 14 ver.

I expect from the manner in which I have expressed myself, that I have sufficiently guarded against its being apprehended that I approve of these ceremonies, notwithstanding the sanction given to them by Peter, Paul, and James. I bring them forward to prove that these practices were rejected by the first Quakers, notwithstanding the authority of these apostles ; and in this sentiment of rejecting these observances as unnecessary and useless ceremonies, I most cordially unite. These things only prove to me that the apostles, though in some respects enlightened men, saw but in part, and knew but in part.

essence of the system of every sect professing christianity. The first reformers in every successive age did much, though I believe they all left much room for further improvement. The apostles, those called the Protestant reformers*, and the first Quakers did much in their respective generations; but to every one of them lukewarm successors followed. As to the Quakers, I think their reformation is left just where the first generation left off; and when I have seen the tenacity of many in the present day to old usages, only because they were ancient, I have been ready to query with myself, have many a better foundation, for some of the testimonies they hold out to the world, and on which they even pride themselves, than prescription? Because their forefathers did so, they do so too, without further examination; and if some of these peculiar testimonies were to be taken up now, I much question whether they would be adopted in this day—many would satisfy themselves with doing as their fathers and grandfathers had done, and trouble themselves no farther about the matter. Such are the sad effects of receiving a profession by inheritance, without labouring to procure a possession of their own.

The first Quakers had much to do, and therefore we need not wonder if they left some things undone. Especially respecting the scriptures, their language was ambiguous, and they expressed themselves in so fluctuating a manner on this subject, that I think but little conclusive on either side can be collected from their writings. William Penn and others sometimes expressed themselves pretty fully relating to their not receiving these writings in bulk, and then they retreated again under the shelter of supposed orthodoxy. I am far from attributing this state altogether to the motives of suppressing their real sentiments through improper fear; they had departed far from commonly received opinions, and they might think it prudent to use caution. Perhaps too in the multiplicity of errors they had to combat, this subject did not engage their full attention. I think many parts in their writings warrant this conclusion—at any rate they practically laid aside the implicit admission of the doctrines contained

* I almost hesitate to class Luther, Calvin, &c. among real reformers; their honest intentions in some things must be acknowledged; but the appeal to the sword in the support of their doctrines in my view greatly obscures their brightness, and renders their usefulness suspected.

in part of the scriptures, when they held war to be unlawful, and rejected the observations of baptism and the last supper. It is no just cause of imputation of blame on the character of reformers, if succeeding reformers see cause to go farther. The first of this society did much towards the work of reformation, and carried a righteous opposition to the long train of superstitious practices, farther than any other society which I have ever heard of. But, alas! their successors as well in former as in present days have grievously degenerated; yet I am well assured there are among them, as among every people, honest, sincere minds, who amidst the almost overwhelming degeneracy endeavour individually to keep themselves unpolluted: but as a body, I can view them only as a fallen church—so that when an attempt was made among them to call back to first principles, and endeavour to advance the work of reformation, among no people was there found to be greater opposition than among them. It was this state of things which caused the present separation, and not any disposition towards libertinism, but quite the reverse.

I have already alluded in one of my former publications to this attempt for reformation in the society, some years ago, many of those, who have now withdrawn from its connection, zealously laboured to promote it, and for a while some of those who remain joined in it. Thus, for a season they travelled in company—some believed it right to advance, while others became frightened at the perils of the journey; perhaps the love of the world, and a consciousness of their not being sufficiently clean-handed in this respect enfeebled some.

In this situation of things, a question was set afloat respecting the scriptures, and came before the society in its collective capacity—a disposition appeared prevalent in many to enforce uniformity of sentiment on this subject, as the bond of communion with them. Minutes were framed, which had a strong tendency this way; and much of the current of preaching was turned from zealously testifying against the lifeless formality, and the evils of a worldly spirit under its various disguises, and instead thereof an adherence to outward rule was greatly insisted on. Much was said of the infallibility of the society, and a language very like to that of the degenerate Jews, was frequently heard both in private and in public, “We have Abraham to our father, and are in bondage to no man.”

man." It has been a favourite topic to compare the society to the Jews, and to call them a highly favoured people. But ah! dear friends, of what benefit will favours conferred be, if you have not improved under them?

I can by no means subscribe to the opinion, that any nation, or sect of people, are more particularly, or exclusively, under divine notice or favour. Such an opinion in my view savours of arrogance. This fond idea appears to have been very hurtful to the Jews, and most sects in this day fall into a similar error. Individuals of every nation, sect and country, are owned by God in proportion to the sincerity of their hearts: but I cannot suppose a just God, the common father of mankind, looks on nations and sects with a partial eye; or regards the party distinctions, of professions and countries, into which mankind are divided. I think it is an important distinction for us to attend to, that it is not by the badge of a profession we shall be tried, but by our own conduct as individuals; yet many seem to hope a name, an outward profession, will be of service to them. Surely a vain trust! I suppose most will admit the inefficacy of a mere profession, but many who would acknowledge it by words, have yet some secret trust in it—though they would be almost ashamed to acknowledge it to others, and even attempt to hide it from themselves. Thus we are often the dupes of the deceivableness of our own hearts; the power of self-deception is great. I do indeed think there is a striking similarity between the Jews and the Quakers. But then I think it right to take the point of comparison with the Jews in the days of Christ, when the Pharisees and Sadducees, the formalists and the libertines, equally combined against the introduction of pure, genuine religion among them.

Some have alleged that those who have withdrawn from the society, should have continued among them, like the prophets among the Jews, and laboured further for their reformation. Honest endeavours were for a considerable time used for this purpose, but at length the time seemed fully come for a separation. Some of us felt clear of further active labour among them, yet we retain good will towards all, and continue to love those of honest minds among them dearly, notwithstanding our sentiments differ widely from each other. Let me now give the word of serious warning on a subject, which long before my separation from the society, as well as since, has deeply im-

impressed my mind—the holding up this people, as so highly favoured, frequently telling them of the covering of good over their meetings; and such like expressions, tending, I fear, to lull them to rest in their present state of fatal security. My mind was greatly grieved, when I often heard these declarations, while I remained in outward connection with them. I often heard these things, when I believed the real state of things was very, very different. They talked of life, but death reigned; and this soothing their ears with pleasant tales of their being owned in their very degenerate state, is very agreeable to them, but it keeps up the delusion, and has a powerful tendency to hasten their downfall. It is certainly intoxicating to this people to be so frequently held up in this high point of view, but ah! mark the dismal consequences; they will yet be more apparent. The Jews had a very high opinion of themselves, as being the people of God, though there appears but little trace of it in the manner of their lives. I suppose their teachers filled their ears with these things—so did not Christ, and on this account, he was hated, persecuted, and finally crucified by them. He told them of their evil conduct, and did not spare the Pharisees under their hypocritical coverings, prophesying the downfall of their city and temple. O! that the preachers among this people may beware of doing great injury to them, crying peace in their ears, and thus encouraging them to sleep the sleep of death. I wish such among them, who are at seasons sensible of the general state of death, may not encourage such flattering declarations. I fear that for some time past there has been too much of a disposition to cover; and especially since the late separations, as if in opposition to them, to endeavour to make things appear pretty well. But all will not do; “for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known;” and the sooner people come to know their real state, it will be the better, lest by long continuance in wrong doing, through wilful disobedience the things which belong to their peace be hid from their eyes. Some may think I speak closely, yet I trust I am your true friend in thus faithfully giving you the word of warning, and sounding an alarm in your borders.

I now come to a subject which has occasioned a great outcry among this people: some scrupled to form the contract of marriage according to the mode practised by the society, though

though the essential requisites for making this engagement were duly attended to. Care was taken to give a sufficient degree of publicity to their intentions previously, and the contract was formed for the joint lives of the parties before a competent number of respectable witnesses. I consider these two matters as essential to forming the contract of marriage, and every thing beyond it, whether the priest and ring, or the public exhibitions required by the Quakers in their mode, as only appendages of superstition. For my own part, my sentiments are very remote from any thing that would in the smallest degree infringe the inviolability of the marriage covenant, or have any tendency to encourage any clandestine proceeding; because I think any relaxation in these respects, would be of most dangerous tendency to good morals, and probably open a door for much licentiousness. If it had not this hurtful effect on those who might first step in this track, it would be setting a very bad example to others; and I can by no means bring myself to prefer the specious in theory to the useful in practice. In all things we should have *practical* good in view. I thus wish to guard the declaration of my sentiments on this subject, that by an explicit avowal of my opinion, I may endeavour to remove all just reproach, as some have been rashly forward to throw much censure on the present occasion. Perhaps it may also serve as a necessary caution, lest any in their haste to get rid of the bondage of unnecessary formalities, may adopt conclusions not duly weighed, on this important occasion. We are frail, and I expect the restraint of necessary engagements will always be needful in this stage of existence, where human weakness is so conspicuously manifest. But then I wish we may approach as near to simplicity as we can—in this point of simplicity I think the Quaker mode is exceptionable. I expect the inconveniences were not so great in the first rise of the society; their numbers were more contracted, and but few, especially of the younger rank, attended their meetings of discipline. But in the more enlarged circle at the present time the appearance of the parties in their meetings to declare their intentions of marriage, is a kind of public exhibition often attended with much parade, and needless expence in preparation. I know these things were advised against, but what signify cold written rules, when the practice enjoined had so much of a contrary tendency to encourage what was by words advised against? Direct

rect that there shall be a public appearance before a mixed assembly, and notwithstanding all rules and regulations to the contrary, most will be induced from one motive or another to deck themselves for the occasion. Some will be influenced by a desire for shew and ostentation; others will follow the current that they may not appear singular. I consider one principal cause which in these instances sets afloat the motives of vanity, is the public appearance; and the taking away this temptation would more effectually remove them, than the cold precepts of a paper of advice ordered to be read on the occasion. In this and every other case, it is necessary to come at the source of the evil effectually to remove it: but it is too common to content ourselves with palliatives, and thus frequently the evil gets beyond cure. In this case I cannot see any advantage likely to arise from the personal appearance of the parties. I think I have shewn that it is attended with much disadvantage, and I cannot perceive any thing that is gained by it, in the material point of enquiry into the clearness of the parties. But in this, as well as in other respects, the society was unreasonably attached to their old customs, without considering the changes which varying circumstances always render necessary. I remember this subject of marriage was under the consideration of a committee of the yearly meeting of Ireland, in 1800. A few alterations were then reluctantly made in some matters of smaller or trifling import, relative to the mode of marriage; but one personal appearance they tenaciously retained. I heard it then alleged, and I think it was the only matter offered even as the shadow of a reason for the continuance of the custom, that it gave an opportunity to communicate advice to the parties concerned. I think I may appeal to the general experience of those who have passed through this often painful ceremony of exhibiting themselves as a spectacle to be gazed at, whether such seasons of flutter and agitation were favourable for the profitable reception of good advice. I suspect they were not; and if any had a word of exhortation to communicate to the parties concerned, they might have chosen a more fit season to communicate it in private; it would probably then be more likely to meet an attentive ear.

The next step which I object to in their manner of marriage, is another exhibition still more public than the first one, at the time of making the contract in a meeting-house often
before

before a promiscuous croud of uninterested spectators. I have for several years scrupled to countenance this mode, and have therefore hesitated to subscribe my name as a witness when I happened occasionally to be present at such times. This business was frequently attended by a large procession, generally dressed out in much finery for the occasion; and I again repeat it, that so long as you enjoin a public appearance, you will never be able to prevent an ostentatious parade very generally to prevail on such occasions. Besides I cannot see the least necessity for such a public appearance. The contract cannot be more binding, because made in the presence of a number of witnesses collected together in a meeting-house, than if made before a competent number of witnesses in a private room. You profess that your meetings should be solemn seasons; and can you think that assembling a large concourse of people, mostly brought together from idle curiosity, which has a natural tendency to produce airiness of disposition, is likely to be attended with good consequences, or add any additional solemnity? I have known some, who, to avoid some of these inconveniences, have gone to small meetings in the neighbourhood, and there passed through the ceremony, and disappointed the curiosity of their neighbours. But why was it necessary to go at all to meeting-houses? I have often endeavoured to trace the cause of this practice. I have heard, but I cannot rely fully on the authority, that such was not the practice in the first rise of the society; but that then marriage contracts were made in private rooms, before witnesses. I think the testimony against the human imposition of the priest and ring, as held by the first Quakers, was truly a noble one. They bravely stepped forward in opposition to the authority of human laws, and the fancied sacredness popularly attached to superstitious customs, and in word and deed proclaimed to the nations (and faithfully suffered much on account of their upright, firm conduct), that there was no need of a set of hired teachers; that marriages could be righteously entered into, without the intervention of the usurped authority of man, who sought to draw gain from this quarter; for which purpose the priests promoted the opinion, that marriages were not valid without their pretended sanction: and I think the Quakers, in some degree, seek to keep up their system, by making the consent of their body appear necessary to the rightly entering into this contract; or else, why do they make
such

such an outcry against marriages not precisely according to their mode? It appears that there was as much outcry against Quaker marriages in that day, because they were not according to the prescribed fashion, as some now-a-days bearing the same name, but having departed from the spirit which actuated some of their predecessors, attempt to raise against some recent marriages, because they do not square with their pattern. For my part, I consider this outcry as a striking proof among many others, that you are guided by a very different spirit from what actuated them—some do it unthinkingly, and from a timorous dread of innovation, afraid to alter the least jot or tittle, which they think is consecrated by antiquity. I think I am not chargeable with want of christian charity in expressing my belief that others are influenced by notions of gross superstition in this case, and attribute some superiour sanctity to the contract formed within the walls of their meeting-houses: for I have known that many among the Quakers have asserted that they preferred a marriage by a priest to this new mode. The first members of the society were not solicitous to obtain the sanction of law for their proceedings, resting satisfied in the consciousness of the purity of their intentions. Nevertheless, their marriages, on some trials, are declared to be valid, and sanctioned by the common law. Thus they rested on this ground for many years—some alterations were made in England by a statute law respecting marriages, in which Quaker marriages were recognized about one hundred years after their first rise as a separate society: but I believe they never in Ireland received any further sanction, than what the common law gives to them, and to all other marriages contracted before witnesses: under which description these new marriages so unthinkingly reprobated come. I only mention what I believe will be found to be a correct statement of the law in this respect, without laying much stress on it, for I feel no hesitation in pronouncing that such contracts of marriage are binding and of sufficient validity, even if they want the sanction of an outward law; and here I stand on the same ground as was taken by the first Quakers. I have frequently spoken of a declension, which came rapidly on in the next immediate generation to that of the first reformers; and here I think we must look for the origin of some of the practices now so tenaciously adhered to, as if nothing which did not precisely

square with their model could at all be right. I apprehend it was then that the practice crept in of marriages being performed in meeting-houses, to assimilate it as nearly as might be to the modes of other societies. In England marriages were then, I suppose, mostly made in their public churches (so called), and I expect there was a disposition prevalent in many of the society then rapidly degenerating, to approach as near to the practices of others as they could in this and other respects, and yet keep up the shew of being a distinct sect; they in too general a way had lost that disposition of christian fortitude which enables with true firmness to venture to be singular in the right, and this in my opinion continues the state of the society down to the present times. Ah! how have many of them lost that christian firmness, which caused their forefathers to disregard the opinions of the world, and made them willing to prefer the reproach of men to their favour, when put in competition with the answer of a good conscience towards God! But alas! behold the reverse!—how are many returning again to the beggarly elements, and though in words they cry up their predecessors in the truth (as they call them) are yet in many of their actions running directly counter to the many virtues of which some of them were conspicuous examples!

To shew more clearly the progress of the scruple which arose respecting the old mode of marriage, I now subjoin a copy of a paper addressed to the Quarterly Meeting of Ulster, by the two first who believed it right for them to dissent in this particular:—

“ To the Quarterly Meeting to be held at Lurgan, 12th month, 8th, 1800.

“ Upon mature consideration, we believed it best to lay the following before you, in preference to the Monthly Meeting, in the bounds of which we reside, believing it to be in a very unfit state to sit in judgment; moreover, apprehending that the manner in which we are led, would be greatly misrepresented, concluded it safest, the province in its collective capacity*, should have the matter immediately from ourselves, and we hereby

* At this time the Quarterly Meeting was much larger than it is at present, many who then attended as members having since withdrawn from connection with them.

inform you, that we have intentions of taking each other in marriage, but have to acquaint you, that we feel our minds restrained from conforming to the usual mode previous to, and in the accomplishing of marriages, believing there are many forms attached thereto, which are by no means necessary, and we consider every thing not necessary superfluous, and should have no place in minds sincerely disposed to walk in the simplicity truth leads those into, who fully and unreservedly adhere to its convictions, free from imbibed prejudices to established customs, in this or other respects; customs with which we cannot unite, nor support by our example, without doing violence to our own feelings, which we conceive to be of more consequence than that of falling under the censure of men, or bodies of men, for noncompliance with these customs for which we can see no real necessity; such as the personal appearance of the parties declaring their intentions, and going through a round of formal ceremonies, the repairing to meeting-houses, in order to accomplish them, which we consider a superstitious practice, and a practice to which much unnecessary preparation and attendance are attached; a practice with which we cannot unite, nor support by our example, believing they might as well be accomplished in a more simple manner, before a competent number of witnesses. Therefore, under these considerations, and from apprehensions of duty, and from no other motive whatever we dare not but dissent from the established mode, and are restrained from going through the round of formal compliances to the rules of the society, however singular it may appear, and how much soever we may be censured for our sentiments, believing we have not been led into them through a curious enquiry after new things, nor from any desire of our own to introduce novelties, neither from any previous concert or conversation with any individual or individuals whatever, but by attending to the gradual unfoldings thereof in our own minds, without either of us knowing how the mind of the other was circumstanced, finding on mentioning it to each other, that the feelings of the one corresponded with those of the other, so that it is no light matter to us, nor the effect of rash judgment, but that of calm and deliberate consideration. We believe it necessary, undeniably so, that due enquiry and publication be made in all such cases, in order to prevent any thing clandestine taking place; therefore we matter not how strict a scrutiny be

made into our conduct, and we expect our intentions will be published, but are restrained from having them published among any particular society, but in such a manner as to have it general, allowing sufficient time for any to make their objections, between their being first published and the accomplishing of them, which we expect will not be in a meeting-house, but according to the most simple mode, as being most consistent with the importance of the subject, apprehending it best for us to do whatever may appear right, without looking to consequences, at the same time wishing to give every consideration its due weight; and however severe and exercising the trial to us may be, thus to dissent in so particular a manner from established modes, we are at times enabled to rejoice under the sustaining evidence, that we are in the line of our duty, in thus bearing our testimony against the useless forms of a society grievously entangled in a wilderness of customs and opinions received by tradition, and adopted without examining the nature, tendency, or necessity thereof. It is with a degree of awfulness we have to communicate these things to you, and are your real friends.

“ *School-Hill, near Lisburn,*
12th month, 7th, 1800.

JOHN ROGERS, JUN.
 ELIZABETH DOYLE.”

I was present at the Quarterly Meeting when this paper was read, and was a witness to the haughty rejection of it by many of those who are now most active in conducting the discipline of the society, and preserving what they call good order. I had mostly at that time withdrawn from the society, but attended that Quarterly Meeting to express some matters which impressed my mind respecting them, before I finally separated from them. What passed at that Quarterly Meeting relating to this business, and another matter which came before them, in which they condemned the innocent, and let the guilty go free, was to me an additional confirmation that no real reformation could be expected among them as a society.

I think many who have condemned this mode of marriage have done it hastily, and only looked at it in one point of view; some considered it no farther than to conclude that it must be wrong, because it was contrary to the rule and practice of the society: others, of a little more consideration, by only viewing it hastily on one side, feared it might open a door for clandestine

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proceedings. If I thought it were likely to produce this effect, I should be ready to condemn it as well as they; but in these cases every essential requisite is strictly attended to, as far as relates to previous enquiry, &c.—it has not the stamp of an outward society, but nothing else is wanting, and I hope the day will come, when marriages will be simplified, and it will be seen to be needless to have either the ceremony of the priest and ring, or the license of a particular sect, and a solemn contract formed before suitable witnesses, after due notice has been given by its being fully known for a reasonable previous time, will be thought sufficient. Some talk much of the sanction of law, but if the parties wish to act clandestinely, we know this legal tie can at any time be purchased for a few shillings; and while this is the case, it may not be reasonably expected that this new mode (as it is called) will be resorted to, by such who desire to act clandestinely, when they can attain what is considered a legal sanction on so much easier terms.

Immediately after the Quarterly Meeting, the Monthly Meeting of Lisburn proceeded to treat with the parties for their intended offence; for some account whereof I refer to a letter written by John Rogers, junior, to one of those employed to visit him, and which is inserted at the close of this publication, and contains, I think, much valuable matter, as well as exhibits a specimen of the lifeless discipline frequently exercised among this people.—Here follow the testimony of their disunity, which they published after the completion of the marriage, and the answer returned to it by John Rogers:—

“Whereas John Rogers, junior, and Elizabeth Doyle, made profession with us the people called Quakers; but having (as they allege, *through motives of conscience*) so far deviated from the good order and known rules established amongst us as a society, as to join together by way of marriage, in a manner differing therefrom, whereby an opening might be made for much disorder, improper and clandestine connexions, notwithstanding a considerable degree of labour had been administered in endeavouring to dissuade them from it: Now, in order to clear the society from such proceedings, as we apprehend not warranted by truth, we hereby disown the said John Rogers and Elizabeth Doyle from membership with us the said people.”

The following answer was returned:—

“ I return thee the inclosed testimonial of denial, and may inform thee that it is a point so very immaterial, whether or not it goes forth, that we are no ways desirous of lifting up a finger towards objecting to it or not, it being a matter of so little consequence to us how it is worded or in what manner it is set forth, feeling no uneasiness at the steps we have taken, nor condemnation, but quite the contrary for our past conduct with respect to these things, which has brought us under censure. We are no way conscious in ourselves of having committed any breach of good order, and the labour administered to us, has been so much without spirit and without life, that it was no more to us than as the sounding brass or the tinkling cymbal.

5th mo. 8th, 1801.

JOHN ROGERS, Jun.”

TO JACOB HANCOCK.

I now sum up the conclusion of this matter relating to marriages, by further mentioning, that the manner of the marriage was by the parties subscribing in the presence of witnesses, a contract which had been previously prepared, and which was also signed by the witnesses. I have endeavoured to look at it in every point of view, and I consider it as firmly binding a contract as can be made in any other way. I subjoin the marriage contract of William James Hogg and Mary Ann Wood, who, notwithstanding all the clamour raised against the former marriage, have with christian firmness ventured to do what they believed to be right, by marrying in the same manner.

“ We, William James Hogg, son of James Hogg, late of Lisburn, in the county of Antrim, deceased, and Mary his wife, and Mary Ann Wood, daughter of Isaac Wood, late of the city of Waterford, and Deborah his wife, both deceased, having intentions of taking each other in marriage, our relations and connexions having been informed thereof, and the matter being publicly known, for more than a month previous to the date hereof, and nothing occurring to obstruct the accomplishment of our said intentions, we do, this fourth day of first month, in the year one thousand eight hundred and two, in the presence of the under-named persons, assembled at the house of James Christy, of Stramore, in the county of Down, for the purpose of witnessing our marriage contract, take each other as husband and wife, and
promise,

promise, through divine assistance, to continue faithful in these relations till death separate us, and in confirmation thereof, we subscribe our names as husband and wife.

WILLIAM JAMES HOGG,
MARY ANN HOGG."

" And we, the said under-named persons, do hereby certify that the above engagement was entered into in our presence, the day and year above written.

HANNAH CHRISTY,	MARY HOGG,
MARY NICHOLSON,	JAMES CHRISTY,
MARY CHRISTY,	SARAH DAWSON,
JOHN CHRISTY, Jun.	HANNAH DAVIS,
THOMAS CHRISTY,	JOSIAH MALONE,
ANN MAGEE,	THOMAS PHELPS,
JAS. NICHOLSON, Jun.	SAMUEL SINTON,
(A Copy.)	WILLIAM DAWSON."

I thus give an account of the mode adopted, that the unprejudiced may see that it is attended with good order and regularity. Because some of us have believed it right to point out frequently in strong terms the inefficacy of mere forms, an erroneous idea has been taken up by some, as if we disapproved of all rules or regularity—this is by no means the case; but there is an essential difference between setting up an adherence to the rule of a particular society, and implicitly adopting it without examination, only because it is a law, and the acting according to the strictest rules of propriety founded on sound and substantial reasons. Rules can only be the means to lead to an end, but rules by some have been considered as the chief corner stone: it is this abuse of rule that we testify against; so that the question at issue, when it is fairly stated, is not whether all rules are improper, but whether the rules of the Quaker society are in all cases right, and also whether they as a body did not too much venerate their regulations, and almost idolize them, looking for more from them than any outward rule, even if entirely proper in itself, can yield. I think by these means many of their ruling members became stiff in the letter, and lax in the design; they recommended too much to rules, and this is one cause of the present deplorable degeneracy so prevalent among them. Rules like bodily exercise may be said to profit little, but godliness is profitable to all things;

it is necessary to have more a view to the substance, than to look for so much from a mere conformity to rules agreed on among any people: this appears to be the great deficiency in the present day among all churches, and quite as much among Quakers in general as others, and on account of this abuse, the best interests of christianity are languishing among every denomination of professing christians. The reformation then must consist in the opposite conduct, in laying less stress on rules, creeds, and external belief, and recurring more to rightly-regulated conduct, which only with any propriety can be called godliness.

The Quakers have built too much on the supposed divine origin of their discipline and practices; every other society claim equally a kind of infallibility for their forms. A day of severe trial is now come on all these pretensions, in which I believe many practices and customs once highly venerated, will not be able to stand. I can truly say I have sought in this, as well as in my former publications, to promote what I believe to be the cause of truth and righteousness—I know many form different sentiments respecting me; but I desire to be indifferent to the censure of men in the discharge of what I believe to be duty: I am even willing to bear the reproach, if I may in a little degree be useful to my fellow-men, by unmasking superstition, and attempting to remove some deep-rooted errors, that pertinaciously adhere through the imbibed prejudices of education, and which have grown up like tares among wheat when men slept. I seek only to pull down what I believe to be unsound. Some think I am plucking up the good old fence—I fear it is mostly withered and dead; it does not afford that preservation which some fancy it does to the youth and others, and therefore I wish to direct to that which will be found to be a sure preservation, an attention to the gift of God revealed in the heart. Then though the dead thorns of rules and outward observations which have been too much relied on, shall be burnt up, a hedge of a living growth will arise in the heart, and as we live in this divine inclosure, we shall experience protection from every hurtful thing to be afforded, though we be unconnected with outward societies or rules. This is what I most earnestly desire for myself and others; and I hope I am endeavouring to manifest by my conduct, that in separating from an outward body of people, I am not seeking undue liberty.

I wish to lay aside the trammels of men, that I may be more firmly bound by the law of my God.

Though I disbelieve many things on what I consider clear conviction, which others swallow without much examination; in the important and proper sense of the word, I am not an infidel. It is certain that I disbelieve many parts of the scripture to be of divine original: I have not adopted this opinion hastily; it has been in my mind the growth of several years. In my ministerial labours, I was frequent in quoting them, even often such parts of them as I now think I have good reason to reject. I find this has been made a kind of charge against me; to which I readily answer, I lay no claim to infallibility, I wish to follow clear convictions, even at the expence of acknowledging my errors in times past—a contrary disposition has a strong tendency to prevent all further improvement.

I for a while followed the common line I had been accustomed to, by quoting passages relating to the Jewish wars, and attempting to allegorize them: this practice had not perhaps so hurtful an effect within the pale of the Quaker society, because many among them really believed, and almost all professed to believe, that wars were unlawful; thus quoting these passages among them did not appear to be likely to strengthen practical sentiments for war.

When I believed it right for me to go out to labour more generally among other societies, I found the case different. They were accustomed to draw support in favour of war from these historical records, declaring it to have been formerly carried on by divine appointment; and I found that quoting these passages, and using them allegorically, had a tendency to strengthen their ideas in favour of this destructive evil; I therefore gradually forebore to quote such parts any longer; indeed I know of no way to shew war to be unlawful, which I sometimes find it my duty to do, if I at the same time admit it to have been allowed, nay even sanctioned by the command of God in former times. I doubt if real advantage can be gained by attempts to allegorize such passages. I know they are glossed over by saying they are typical of the inward struggles of a christian, and this was the way the Quakers generally took of explaining them: but can we suppose that God really caused these atrocious bloody acts to be done by moral agents under his directions, for the metaphorical or allegorical instruction

of future generations? I will not deny but that a good moral may at times have been drawn from a simile, that with regard to the figure itself was untrue or improper; and this may be accounted for by considering the nature of figurative language, in which the sentiment intended to be conveyed may be sound, and yet the figure made use of to illustrate it may be improperly adapted to it; for truth is of so powerful a nature, as in some cases not to be entirely lost, although it be mixed with error—yet I think we ought to free it as much as we can from all mixture. Error may be winked at in the days of ignorance, and the offering accepted on account of the sincerity of heart; yet I consider it dangerous to tamper with any species of it, when it is seen to be such. Let none think they will be justified in continuing in practices from the plea of former custom, if such are now seen to be wrong: it gradually hurts the honesty of the mind. On these considerations I was then induced to examine more closely into those matters, and the more I examined, I was still farther convinced that they could not be as they are represented. I went on for some time in this way—on further looking into them, I was compelled to give up the authenticity of these parts of the scripture records; and I came to see that this book called by some *holy*, had no just claim to that title in bulk, but that each part must depend on its own intrinsic value, and the internal evidence attending it on due examination.

These are my sentiments respecting the Bible; for I do not consider it as containing unmixed truth: besides I fear many err in laying too much stress on these writings, and I think it arises from a departure from true vital religion. In proportion as the substance is lost, people grasp at the shadow. I believe in revelation—in a communication of the will of God in the hearts of all his intelligent creatures, in proportion to their obedience to what they already know, and which I believe is sufficient to effect our well-being, by our joining in with its convictions, and to procure the favour of our beneficent Creator in time and in eternity. Most sects confine their ideas of what they call revelation to the outward letter of the scriptures; when they speak of revelation, or the revealed will of God, they only mean what is contained in the outward book—they carry their ideas no farther. This distinction appears to me not to have been sufficiently attended to by the Quakers, many
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of whom I think have no very clear ideas on the subject. Hence in the language common in the world, Deist means one who does not believe in revelation, that is in the scriptures throughout. This phrase has been adopted among the Quakers, and thrown out plentifully as a term of reproach; and in addition to the commonly received meaning of the word as I have now stated, they have affixed a further meaning of disbelieving what they with more propriety call revelation, the internal communication of the divine will:—to these charges I explicitly answer, if Deist only means as the word is commonly understood in the world, a disbeliever in the entire divine inspiration of the scriptures throughout, I am a Deist: if the additional meaning is annexed to it, of discrediting a communication to the heart of man immediately proceeding from God, I am not one of that number; for I do most firmly believe in the reality of this inestimable privilege, the first and best of the gifts of a merciful God, *only wise*, to his creature, man.

Deism is frequently coupled with libertinism, as if they were inseparable; and perhaps the conduct of some may have given some colour to the pretext. If this be the meaning of the word, I am not a Deist; for I trust my conduct has evinced that I neither recommend nor practice an undue liberty. I think there is great want of candour in classing together those who may happen to think nearly alike on some particular subjects, but yet whose sentiments on most other matters, as well as their general conduct, are totally dissimilar. I expect most members of particular societies would think it unfair to be judged of, from the evil conduct of some of their fellow-members; so I think it argues a want of candour too generally prevalent, because some hold sentiments similar to those propagated by persons of wrong conduct, but who are in no manner connected with them, that they should, without discrimination, attempt to class us with them. I know that men of impure lives have held some sentiments which I firmly embrace as truth, and so have many hypocrites assumed the appearance of religion; in neither case would it be just to blend the sincere and the profligate together.

Names signify in reality very little, but sometimes they are used as arrows in the hands of those influenced by a party spirit; yet, when aimed against those who seek not their praise
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from men, but to be found in some degree of acceptance with God, they fall harmless and blunted to the ground.

I think it best to mention a matter in this place, which I suppose some have remarked with dissatisfaction. In mentioning the society, I have for some time past generally spoken of them as the people called Quakers, and sometimes for brevity, the Quaker society. I have not done so from any unkind disposition, but I hesitate to call them by the name which I suppose they wish to be denominated by. I scruple to call them *Friends*; I cannot comply with their claim in assuming this title exclusively to themselves, because it appears to me to be asserting a superiority to other sects. Do they mean by it that they have a supereminent claim to being friends to truth and its progress, or to possessing more brotherly love towards one another, than others? I fully believe there are among them, as among others, sincere friends to truth, and those who eminently possess true brotherly love: yet I think this description is not applicable to them as a body; for as a society I consider them to be in a very low estate when they are measured by the standard of christian purity. I have often heard much said among them to promote what they called love and unity; but I fear the unity they sought to promote was very superficial, not that unity of the spirit which animates to join together with one heart and one mind to labour for reformation in the individual and in the general; but a cold outside unity which may be compared to the quiet of sleep, and this unity I believe it was right should be broken up. Some of us long laboured to arouse one another from this state, but many called these warnings breaches of unity. I now make one more effort by this address to tell you some unpalatable truths respecting your situation. I feel so much good will towards you, that I venture once more, as I have often done before, to incur your disapprobation by telling you honestly what I think concerning you. Whatever you may think, I do it in love—I fear it will be unavailing to many; like those in a deep sleep who even amidst approaching danger, are dissatisfied at the well-meant endeavour of those who try to arouse them—they perhaps just open their eyes for a little time, express their displeasure at being disturbed, and then fall asleep immediately again, and go on in their dreams of worldly pursuits,

suits. Yet I trust these warnings will not be altogether lost on others; if they do not produce immediate conviction, they may induce profitable considerations, which may arise in future seasons, and lead them into close and serious reflections on some subjects, which I have pointed at. I want no one to form hasty conclusions, either to adopt or to reject. Be willing calmly to consider and coolly to examine. I have no desire to lead to barren speculation unconnected with practical utility; but I believe it would greatly tend to the furtherance of real religion and true godliness, if nothing were received on the score of tradition, without first undergoing a careful examination; whereas receiving things upon credit tends to produce a superficial state of mind, and a trust in a religion merely of education. To the prevalence of this careless disposition, and to the minds of many being mostly absorbed in worldly concerns, I attribute the low state of things among you.

Some talk of the foundations of many being subverted by inducing the people to think for themselves, but I expect many had no solid foundation of their own, and the events of the present day only shew that such were without a foundation, and in this point I believe the present shaking will be of much service. It does not take away the real foundations, but only shews that many things which were supposed to be on sure foundations, were in truth without any, and therefore it is that many of your specious buildings are falling. Many built on tradition, and rules and regulations were erected on it; this tradition is shaken, and of course the superstructure falls.

I think I am doing a real service in pointing out in various ways this insecure system: I have solid peace in doing so, and in my quiet retreat feel good will towards all, regardless of the censure and reproaches attempted to be thrown on me. The true christian is redeemed from all fear but the fear of offending God, and knows no enemy but the corruption of his own heart.

I have sometimes compared outward societies to crowded cities, in which many slight houses being joined together, lean upon each other, and little care is taken to sink deep for a foundation; for a time these crazy buildings support each other, but how dreadful, if a crash should come among them; their slight supports would give way, and the downfall of them would be widely spread. If in societies called religious, there is sometimes thought to be support received, I fear in too many cases
perni-

pernicious errors are propped up in them; there is often a fellow-feeling among the members to keep up one another, arising from a common consciousness of wrong conduct. "Spare me in my inordinate love of this world's goods, and I will spare thee in thy failings," is too often a maxim exemplified in conduct, though not expressed in words, and this is miscalled charity. I believe a time is now come for societies to be shaken, and all artificial props to be removed; and that none will be able to stand who are not engaged to have an individual foundation of their own, independent of human aid—how awful is this day in which these things are happening!

I am far removed from a disposition to feel exultation, at what I consider the downfall of the Quaker society; but, on the contrary, I lament their fallen state. I retain sincere good will towards all, and have much esteem for many in this connexion: for with the honest-minded among every society, I can cordially unite, although we may materially differ in sentiment. I ever wish to consider the sincerity of the heart as the true bond of union, and to set very lightly on the superficial badge of making a fellow-profession, or on an uniformity of sentiment. All this may be without any union on sound principles; and there may be a true unity of spirit felt, where very different sentiments prevail. But I esteem it a great error to adopt as brethren, all who make a similar profession, because they are fellow-members of the same society. And this error, I consider, is common to all associations, according to the principles they are now conducted on. How widely different is this superficial unity from the language of Jesus Christ! "Whosoever doth the will of my father who is in Heaven, the same is my mother, my sister, and my brother."

One principal cause of my separation from the Quaker society, was because I could not unite with many under that name on account of their wrong conduct; and this to me was a more powerful motive than any disagreement in judgment on some particular subjects. I saw some of sincere minds, but with mistaken judgments, decidedly join hands with the workers of iniquity, and seek for aid from them to support their system. This fixed my resolution of withdrawing from a society, among whom I was convinced, I could be no longer useful; and events which have happened since my secession still further confirm me in the propriety of the line of conduct, which I have
 adopted.

adopted. I have since my withdrawing from them attended pretty closely to their proceedings; but not from motives of idle curiosity, or from a wish to find out faults; and it appears to me that the aim of the labours of the committees they send out from their General Meetings, is more directed to patch up their system, and by whitewashing it over, to attempt to hide its cracks, than to introduce sound principles, which would lead to real reform. They attempt to procure an uniformity of opinion, and direct all their efforts to this point, while they give the right hand of fellowship to the avaricious, unfeeling worldling, and to the pharisaical formalist, and promote the unprofitable activity of such in their meetings. What can be the end of such things, but still greater degrees of degeneracy?

I sincerely lament that such is their state; but through all, my mind is comforted in the belief, that the downfall of particular societies will prepare the way for removing the many errors, that now overspread the earth, and is preparatory to the more full introduction of genuine truth. I do not hesitate to say, that a society is fallen, when the members of it generally depart from sound principles, although they may still continue to retain their ancient forms and customs; and it is with sorrow I express my belief, that this is the present situation of the people called Quakers. I earnestly desire that the honest and sincere among them, may lay these warnings closely to heart. In the present mighty shakings and overturnings among nations and societies, my earnest desire and my fervent expectation is, that pure un-mixed TRUTH may more generally prevail, and spread its benignant influences over the nations of the earth, causing superstition, bigotry, the spirit of rapine, and of war, and every hurtful disposition to be gradually removed, until mankind come to love as brethren, and, laying aside all party distinctions, be brought to see, that the mighty GOD, the everlasting Father, can only be worshipped in spirit and in truth—and that he regards the sincerity of the hearts of those, who, under every name and profession, and in every country, are engaged to work righteousness, and to do justly.

HERE FOLLOWS THE LETTER FROM J. ROGERS, JUN.
REFERRED TO IN PAGE 69.

AN opportunity now offering, I feel desirous of publishing a letter, I wrote at a time when some individuals by appointment of Lisburn Monthly Meeting were engaged in visiting me, regardless of the censure that may afresh be thrown out. I can truly say, that I have not adopted the sentiments contained therein, from the testimony of any man or book, but from the grounds of clear conviction in my own mind. It is a practice very prevalent with many in the present day, hastily to condemn without giving themselves the trouble of careful examination; therefore no wonder they should form very unfair conclusions.

It is only and alone when the mind is divested of every degree of passion and prejudice, and way given to cool and calm reflection, that a clear search can be made, and right judgment known. Indeed it is a day, wherein all had need seriously to consider, and examine the grounds they go upon, for nothing will stand the test but the pure truth and a conduct conformable thereto: and what signify sentiments never-so sublime in themselves, if there be a deficiency in christian practice?

It may not be amiss to state, that in committing the followning letter to the press, a few words have been left out, and some small alterations made for the sake of clearer expression, but in no wise to alter the sense of the passage. I have also added a few notes by way of more full explanation of my sentiments on some subjects.

Lisburn: 2d month 24th, 1802.

J. R.

BELOVED FRIEND,

UNDERSTANDING that thou entertainest an apprehension, of my mind being hurt and prejudiced by advice, and reading unprofitable and pernicious publications, which have led and influenced me together with my beloved friend, E. D. to indulge sentiments, and therefrom to act contrary to established rules in relation to an important point, now subsisting between us, I feel at this time a freedom to inform thee, and that without the smallest view or design to influence thee, or any one whatever, in our favour, unless upon true and proper grounds and principle, that we are right: but in order that truth may appear, I am willing to as-

sure

sure thee, that no persons ever hinted their sentiments to us respecting these important matters, for which we are now under censure; neither did the one influence the other, for both our minds were similarly exercised, without knowing each other's feelings on the subject, the same things opening with the same clearness, before we expressed any thing of the sort to each other, and then found our minds respecting it agreeing in the same manner, and before we attempted to publish our sentiments we were fully satisfied in ourselves, that it was a path (however difficult it might be) we were to move in, and we, I believe, were not unmindful to count the cost of such an undertaking, before we engaged therein, and were sensible of the host of opposition we should meet with, and which we have experienced, and expect still greater and greater, but we are not discouraged nor alarmed, being more and more confirmed in the belief, that we are pursuing the path laid out for us to move in, however contradictory to the ways of men. And although it is inexpressibly trying, we feel to our unspeakable satisfaction, the strengthening, consoling, undoubted evidence of divine approbation, which is a quite sufficient support, and which never will forsake us, if the fault be not our own.

We know that of ourselves we cannot be sustained, in the pursuit of pure, substantial peace, which is not to be purchased at a low price. But there must be a willingness wrought in the soul to give up all, and he who leads the willing soul according to his own good pleasure, is fully able to bear up and support through all and every of the leadings and dispensations of his pure, unerring will. Though he may see meet to lead the true christian into paths difficult and different from what he once had any idea of, yet it belongeth not to him to say to the gracious leader, what dost thou? or why leadest thou me in this manner? That remarkable passage just occurs to my mind, where it is said, "I will lead the blind by a way that they know not, and in paths they have not seen, I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight; these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Ah! my friend, who are the blind here spoken of? Is it not those who are made blind as to their own judgment, and to every guide, but that of singly, simply, and unreservedly following the clear discoveries of the pure light of truth manifested in the soul? These are led by a way they have not known, neither obtained the knowledge thereof, by or through an atten-

tion to men or to books, or any written rule whatever ; but are willing to be made blind to all and every thing, but an attention to that voice which distinctly says to the attentive soul, " this is the way ; walk in it ;" they are desirous to walk therein, although at first entrance they may see the way they are led in to be dark, yet abiding in true faith, patience, and resignation, light is mercifully afforded to step safely and securely, and though things may appear crooked, and the path they may have to tread intricate, yet keeping with a single eye to the heavenly guide, he causes these seemingly crooked things to be made straight, and points out the way with undoubted clearness, and convincing proofs, never leaving nor forsaking them, if they only stand firm in his counsel, and abide faithful to his requirings, willing to be led by him, whithersoever he pleaseth, having learned clearly to discern between the workings of truth on the mind and the willings and runnings of their own vain imagination, having a foundation in themselves to build upon, without leaning to what others may have to say ; and so having experimentally known what really is good, can rejoice in themselves and not in another, and are not afraid to be led and guided by an inward manifestation of what they have clearly distinguished to be the true witness for God. But it seems new doctrine in the present day, to assert that people should see for themselves, by an attention to that in themselves which if closely adhered to, would lead in the right path without any other aid whatever. I say this seems new doctrine, though the apostle was not afraid to tell the primitive believers, " Ye have an unction from the holy one, and the anointing which ye have received, abideth with you, and ye need not that any man teach you but as the same anointing teaches you and is truth and is no lie." Here he asserted its full sufficiency, having learned in the line of his own experience, the powerful efficacy thereof, and entertained no doubts of the possibility of obtaining a knowledge of its operations from that of the workings of corrupt self, and was not afraid to recommend others to the same pure, inexhaustible and ever unchangeable principle, a principle as old as the creation, and which ever will remain the one pure, holy gift of God to his creature, man, to regulate his affections, and by yielding obedience thereto, purify and prepare him for an entrance into the mansions of undefiled rest and peace.

But ah ! my beloved friend, it requires diligent attention, deep watchings and fastings, watching against evil, and fasting from every

every thing that might interrupt our pursuit towards a thorough acquaintance with this inward director. It is not acquired by now a little and then a little musing on what is good ; but it must be a constant care, and unremitting attention to observe, minutely to observe, what passes in our own minds, without looking to what others are doing ; and I do not at all marvel that where this strict attention and exercising concern is wanting, to hear an observance cried up to rules laid down, because those who scarcely ever give themselves time to see what it really is that passes in their own minds, cannot be expected to have any clear knowledge or discovery of the manifestations of truth in the secret of the soul, delighting in little or nothing else, but hearing and telling some new thing. They are quite unacquainted with the operations of an inward principle, moving them to actions for themselves, and therefore I do not at all wonder to hear these calling in question the rectitude of walking according to the secret dictates of truth revealed in the heart, for really they do not know what it is, to be guided by the unerring spirit of truth, it is stifled in them by their busy minds running hither and thither ; they are sensible of no sure abiding place to rest upon, but are carried away by the sentiments of this one and the other one, and have no sentiments of their own, no sure grounds in themselves to go by, but receive all they have from others, and in this state I do not wonder they should call walking according to the secret influence of truth on the mind, a doubtful point. They find it much easier, and say* it is much safer to walk by rules laid down. They are indulging themselves in the lazy way of following the footsteps one of another, instead of painfully and carefully tracing the right road for themselves step by step ; but this kind of walking would require much to be given up, and cause too much anxiety of soul for those who are so much disposed to dwell at ease. It would require too much of their attention from the concerns of this life ; therefore they find it much easier to tread the path laid out by others, for in this path they can keep a great deal and possess a great many things, which they otherwise would have to part with, were they to enter into a path on their own account, I say on their own account, a path laid out in them-

* It may be well recollected that from many expressions made use of in the course of the dealing with J. and E. R. there was abundant room for these remarks.

selves for themselves, by an experimental knowledge of the leadings and guidings of what really is truth; and so walking therein they can testify that what they have felt is truth, and is no lie.

Ah! it is this that brings into the true order and harmony, and those who know an abiding therein, can, from the grounds of their own experience of its undoubted operations and full sufficiency, without the aid of man, or teachings of men, say with the apostle, and call the attention of the people in this language, "Ye have an unction from the holy one, &c." It is this, and this only, that leads into all truth and true order, and without the sensible experience thereof, regulating our conduct and conforming our actions to its pure dictates, all our conformity to outward rules, merely for the sake of compliance, puts us in no better a situation, than that of a people formerly against whom the most high by the mouth of his prophet testified, "Your fear of me is taught by the precepts of men," which I think is similar to the state the Quakers in general in the present day are in; and I do not know a society existing, concerning whom the language of Christ is more applicable than they, "Ye are like whited sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outside, but within are full of rottenness and dead men's bones," which is the case with all those whose hearts are departed from the Lord, and who are pluming themselves on being thought well of by the world, and amongst men, and are boasting because of their outside appearance bearing the resemblance of beautiful, and walking agreeably to the letter of an outward law, whilst their hearts are going after their covetousness.

Surely this is the situation of the society in the present day, though they are zealous for the support of the law, because they find it easier to walk according to rules laid down, than conform to the pure witness for God in themselves, testifying against the love of ease, the love of pleasure, the love of money, &c.

Ah! these rules, how have they been held up before the view of the people as gods! In short they have been set up as God, worshipped as God, put in the room of God, whilst his pure witness in the soul has been and is trampled under foot; therefore it is God's determination to remove these gods, in whom the people have long been trusting, for he will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images, to any thing set up by man.

A terrible day is come, and more and more will come, wherein the shallow professors shall be astonished; those who
have

have been building on the sandy foundation of tradition, and the works of others, whilst those who have been laying their foundation on the true rock, the revelation of God in the secret of the soul, these through all the turnings and overturnings shall witness a sure place to rest upon.

Now I am more and more confirmed in the belief, that the building which many of you are endeavouring to support will fall, notwithstanding all you can do to support it; for indeed, well may the saying of Jesus Christ be applied, which he made use of concerning the temple at Jerusalem, "It is written my father's house shall be a house of prayer, and lo! you have made it a den of thieves." Such is the case in the present day; the building erected among the people called Quakers is polluted, it is corrupted, it is supported by many with defiled and unwashed hands, robbing God of his honour, and paying worship to dumb idols, whilst the worship of the true God is neglected; therefore this temple will fall, and not one single stone be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down: and I am ready to say in contemplating these awful things, what will ye do for your gods, what will ye do in the day of visitation, in the day of desolation, on all these things in which ye confided? To whom will ye flee for help, and where will ye leave all your glory?

Well, my friend, the Lord will erect a pure standard; I do not mean any particular society or body of people, and those who are concerned to flee thereto, shall indeed know him to be their leader, and shall have no need of the light of the sun, moon, or stars, but the Lord God shall be their light and their leader, in the paths of true order, harmony and peace, and to walk in the precepts of that mild religion which never did, nor never will breathe any thing short of "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will towards all men."

I believe it right for me to say, that as in the conference thou and others had with my friend E. D. and me, I mentioned my disbelief of those parts of scripture records which set forth the Almighty commanding his rational creature, man, to slay his brother; I am not in the least degree changed in my sentiments respecting these important points, but more and more confirmed in them, believing the Lord who created man for a purpose of his own glory, and to love one another, never did in any age of the world command war, which is

quite the reverse. Now, had man, each one for one, strictly adhered to that of God in themselves, which could alone preserve from falling, and lived in his pure fear, which I believe was and is possible for every individual born into the world to do, I suppose war never would have been introduced, but man falling, *individually falling in heart from the Lord, created, and still does create many evils to himself, and amongst the rest, war, not one of the least. Now I cannot believe that these evils spring from a change wrought in God, who is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever.

I believe that these things were permitted formerly, as well as now, on account of the people's hardness of heart, and their sins and gross wickedness; but that it was the positive will of the most high, that man, created for a noble purpose, should so far deviate from the pure law written in the heart, and through disobedience fall therefrom, as in any age of the world to engage in war, I do not believe: for certain I am, that in the day he created man, he never designed him to shed the blood of his brother; but that every soul born into the world, since the day wherein Adam first appeared on earth, was born for the very same designed purpose that Adam was created for, which was to glorify his Maker by obedience to his pure will, and thereby dwelling in righteousness, peace and true harmony; and if through the

* I do not believe that because Adam fell, we are also in a state of transgression, until we by giving way to our own unruly passions commit those acts which the voice of God in the conscience manifestly testifies to be evil, and then we fall from and forfeit innocence; and restoration out of this fall is only and alone to be witnessed by the grace of God, which is mercifully offered to all in due season, and man's individual acceptance or disapprobation in the divine sight, stands in the use he makes of these offers. Man is a free-agent, good and evil are set before him, he may chuse or he may refuse, and his fall individually consists in chusing the evil, and it might be of infinite advantage to mankind, did they, instead of attributing the cause of so many evils existing in the earth, to Adam's fall, and turning their attention to his transgression, look carefully within their own breasts, and see what lodges there; and I believe they would find that many are the evils man brings upon himself by his own individual transgression, and acts of disobedience to the known will of his Creator. Neither can I assent to the generally received opinion, that the earth was cursed for Adam's sake; this would indeed be visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, not only to the third and fourth generation, but down to the latest posterity.

corruption occasioned by man's departing from the Lord, through a succession of ages the order of things be changed, it was man who changed and not God, whose designed purpose in every age respecting man remains unalterably the same, and who never did since the foundation of the world, nor never will, till the end of time, lay out or propose any other means of happiness, than, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And if war be lawful in one age, and not in another, and if God commanded it in former days, and holds it now in this day in abhorrence, for brother to slay brother, he certainly is changed; whereas I believe he is unchangeable, however changeable man may be; he remains unalterably the same, and does not command one thing as essential in one age, and another in another. * Neither do I believe that the coming of Jesus

* In order to support the horrid acts recorded in the Bible as perpetrated by divine command, endeavours are vainly used to make a distinction between what is called the dispensation of the law, and that of the gospel; hence many confuse their ideas, draw a veil over their understandings, and rest satisfied without further search; when, I believe, if they were willing to examine, divested of passion and prejudice, into the nature of these things, they would form more just ideas of them. Let them throw aside every undue attachment to men or books, receiving their testimony no further than meets the evidence of divine illumination in their own minds, which shines forth in a manner sufficient to enable all who are attentive to it, to distinguish between right and wrong; but many overlook its tender intimations, by an attention to other things.

I believe that all God does, is right, and perfectly consistent with his attributes of justice and mercy; but I do not believe that in any dispensation of God to man, he ever authorised wars and bloodshed, whether we read the history of them in the Bible or any other book. The authority of books cannot make that a righteous act in one age, which is wicked in another; and what feeling mind will acknowledge that wars in the present day could be entered into under the influence of the spirit of truth, which is the same in all ages, and from which war never proceeded?

I believe the rule formerly laid down by Jesus Christ was obligatory in all ages, without variation of conduct: "Therefore I say unto you, that whatsoever ye would, that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." And yet how many accounts have we of the open violation of this rule, in men said to be influenced by the most high, and under his direction, doing horrid acts of cruelty to their neighbours; acts which we cannot suppose they would have liked another should have done unto them. I know that the wars and

Jesus Christ changed in the smallest degree, the nature and attributes of the Most High. He came the messenger of a pure and spiritual religion, not a religion which never before existed, but a religion which in all ages had its witnesses, and was, in the most full and clear manner, borne testimony unto in his life and doctrines. He has left us an example that we should follow his steps, being subject to the will of his Father in all things, and if we be his true followers we must tread the path he trod to glory, bearing the cross and despising the shame. But I am firm in the belief that there is not, and never was any true principle or means of salvation, but the light, grace, or spirit of God, a measure and manifestation whereof is given to every man, in order that thereby and therethrough he may work out his own salvation, and it is only and alone by obedience to the inward searchings of this pure, eternal principle that we ever can be saved; therefore I believe it is the only saviour from sin, and it is by witnessing our minds leavened into, and brought under its saving influence, that we know the evil in us subdued, and a redemption wrought in us by a conformity to the will of God in all our actions, and "here is truly a putting on Christ, not by imputation, but actual operation:" and talk what men will of the sufferings and death of Christ, none ever will or can be saved by any other means, than obedience to the grace of God, which only and alone brings salvation. But it is easier for men to flatter themselves that Christ has died for them, and by his sufferings and death reconciled them to God, than to witness a change wrought in them through the tribulated path of obedience to God's grace in their own hearts, which only and alone can render the souls of the sons of men acceptable in the divine sight, and make them true followers

contests which the Jews had with other nations, are of no consequence to us in themselves; but making the Almighty a partaker with them therein, implies a sentiment shocking, and inconsistent to the true ideas concerning the Divinity.

Why condemn wars in the present age, and approve of those carried on in former ones? But the Bible sanctions them, and therefore many go no farther; what they read therein they think must needs be true. Ah! is it not a pity that any book should be so set up, as to ascribe infallibility to it? as is certainly the case, where endeavours are used to impose an implicit belief in all we read without examination, although contrary to the internal evidence of clear conviction in the mind.

of the holy Jesus in the path of regeneration and newness of life: christians, not in name nor profession only, but in deed and in truth, possessing the very nature of Jesus, and coming up in the purity of that blest religion he came to inculcate.

But I do believe that the doctrine of true christianity has been, and is much abused; people have been lulled to sleep, and to dwell at ease in their sins, by holding up that Christ has died for them, and by his one offering has reconciled them to God, and that they have obtained redemption through his blood; whereas I believe redemption to be an individual work, and must be individually witnessed without having any recourse to the sufferings and death of Christ.

I believe the time is come, and more and more will come, wherein individuals rightly initiated into the nature and true design of Christ's coming, will behold the gospel in its own purity, stripped of every vain and corrupt appendage attached thereto by man, and that nothing short of a thorough cleansing by obedience to the grace of God, entitles any to salvation, or can produce in us righteousness, sanctification and redemption, which is indeed Christ formed in us through submission to the gospel power in our own hearts, and this is, I believe, as it is truly and effectually brought forth in us, the only hope of glory.

Now to return to the subject with which I first began, respecting my friend E. D. and me.—I feel easiest to inform thee, and I would wish thee to inform those others appointed with thee in our case, that we are stronger and stronger in the sentiment respecting the manner in which we intend to proceed, being more and more confirmed in the belief, that it is a path required of us to move in, and we dare not (unless we chuse to bring condemnation on ourselves) deviate therefrom. We apprehend that were we to condescend to the advice given us, to conform contrary to what we most assuredly believe to be right, it would be an unrighteous condescension, and bring on ourselves a burden which all the countenance of man could not relieve us of: and although we are sensible that a desire in some degree for our good has incited individuals to take notice of our intentions, yet we believe that the arguments used by some of these come far short of what we apprehend would be likely to influence disinterested souls, who have nothing more at heart than the favour of that God who hath all power—
argu-

arguments which with us have not had the smallest weight, except to confirm us in our sentiments, such as holding out to us the love and esteem our friends have for us, and how highly we are thought of in the world and among men *.

Now, for my part, I must acknowledge I do think those who use such arguments are more desirous themselves to have the esteem of men, though it may be purchased at the expence of falling in the divine sight, than to have the testimony of a good conscience purchased at the loss of the esteem of men, and so they think others have the same ideas; but I think it a very unworthy motive to influence any one to a good action, (and I conceive you would think it a good action in us to conform to your advice) to act from the love and esteem of men, and beneath the dignity of a true christian.

Some are more desirous of having a fair outside, and maintaining an honourable shew, as they term it, among men; and would fain be thought well of, because of their outside appearance, bearing the resemblance of beautiful, instead of having their hearts made clean: these, let them be in ever so much estimation among men, and their deeds ever so much applauded, either by themselves or others, are, I do believe, an abomination in the sight of God, who seeth not as man seeth, and I may say, that it is the fervent desire of our minds, that all the love and esteem of this world may have no weight with us in the pursuit of what we believe to be right, and if in this pursuit we lose the love and esteem of men, we cannot help it. It is much better to have an approving mind, and the testimony of a good conscience, though despised by the world, and even our nearest connexions, than to live in the sunshine of human approbation, and want the consoling evidence of divine favour; the one will soon vanish, the other will remain, when all things here draw towards a conclusion; and be a firm support, and incomparably rich and sure

* Another manner of dealing was handed forth to us, in order to deter us from pursuing the line of apprehended duty; which was pronouncing woes and judgments against us, if we would not conform to the established mode of proceeding, by some whose zeal overcame their knowledge, as if all other modes but theirs were excluded from the favour of God. It may not be amiss here to observe that upon a serious review of our conduct, with respect to the manner of our procedure, we feel no condemnation, but are favoured with that peace which this world can neither give nor take away.

treasure when all other objects fail. Those who are truly desirous of obtaining this prize, press forward without looking to, or having in view either the favours or frowns of men, or the esteem of this one or the other one, but singly, simply, and unreservedly follow those things that make for their own peace.

I believe a good man is not good, merely because he thinks he shall obtain heaven at last, but because he knows it to be his duty to love, serve, fear and obey his Creator and Preserver, knowing he is faithful that has promised, and that his reward is sure if he abide in patient obedience to the end. May the attention of thy mind be turned towards these things, and in true calmness of soul consider them, so as to profit thereby, that thou mayst have a sure resting place for thy feet to stand upon. in this awful day of turning and overturning, wherein the dispositions of many are made manifest and their foundations tried, and things will more and more occur to disturb the rest, the false rest of many who have been at ease, and they shall have torment upon torment, and one vexation on the top of another, and shall be driven hither and thither, having no sure resting place in themselves to stand upon, these things in which they have long been trusting, turning to their confusion; individuals will be raised up more and more to testify, some in one thing and some in another, against the formality of this people, and though many may rage at seeing their Babylon falling, yet all they can do will avail nothing to the hurting of those who believe it right for them to bear their testimony against the idolatry of the times, if they only are faithful.

Surely if ever forms were idolized in any society, they are in that of the Quakers, though they cannot bear to be told so: they cannot bear the approach of any thing to disturb their rest, and those who are concerned to deal plainly with them, and to tell them what they really are, these they acknowledge not, but count them deluded, and carried away by their own vain imaginations, whilst to those who declare unto them smooth things, they are ready to build temples. I do believe it is high time for matters to take a turn, they have long stood in a corrupt state, and I believe a reformation never will take place in a society capacity, because the body is unsound and cannot reform itself, so that it must be by individuals, keeping close to their own particular exercises, and breaking through the mass of corruption in whatever manner may be pointed

out to them, and it is not for these to cast up a way for themselves, but to walk in the way cast up for them, by attending to the pure discoveries of truth in their own minds, and by dwelling in passive resignation, suffer the Lord to do with them whatever he pleaseth; and I believe the greatest opposition these will meet with, and have already met with from without, are the high professors, who having a form of godliness, but being destitute of the power, will neither enter the pure spiritual kingdom themselves, nor suffer those who would to enter; these in all ages have been the bitterest and greatest enemies to the progress of true religion.

I often think of the opposition George Fox met with from the priests and high professors in his day, who built much on the sayings of the prophets, Christ and the apostles; but George had often to tell them that they were out of the life and power in which the true prophets, Christ and the apostles lived; so it is in this day, many are crying up the sayings and acts of George Fox, whilst they are out of the life and power in which George Fox lived; and I believe if ever a reformation does take place, it never will be by looking back to what others have done, for this I believe has been injurious to many; instead of looking forward they have looked backward, and retarded the work in themselves, so that it is the earnest desire of my mind, that individuals in the present day may press forward, without looking to what others have seen or been doing before them; for I believe that each has his own work to do, without looking to generations that are past, and "that God will more and more divide in Jacob, and scatter in Israel, before the reformation be brought about which he designs."

I had not the smallest expectation, nor the least idea, when I first took up the pen to communicate a little of my thoughts to thee, that I should have proceeded so far; but matters arising in my mind one after another, I felt easiest to express them after this manner, and as thou hintedst thy apprehensions of my dabbling in French philosophy, I may say I never knew there was such a thing, neither am I at all acquainted with what French principles are; and as to T. Paine's writings, I never to my knowledge saw them, nor heard them, neither do I know the nature of them, therefore can form no judgment respecting them. I am not anxiously desirous to know

the opinion of any man. I think I can truly say that I sincerely wish to know what really is truth for myself, purchased at my own expense, without looking to any man or set of men.

Now I am free to say once more before I conclude, that we have not the smallest intention of proceeding according to established modes; and may we be so preserved as to be willing to steer whatever course, which, on serious consideration, may appear to be right in this or any other respect, though it may be the giving up even reputation, and every other thing that may lie in our way in the pursuit of pure substantial peace—and we have no doubt but we shall lose the love and esteem of men, except of the truly wise and honourable, and it is of this number we desire to be, “although their lives may be counted as madness, and their end to be without honour: yet behold, how are they numbered with the righteous, and their portion is with the just!”

I now conclude with fervent desires for thy substantial welfare, and that thou mayst in true quietness and calmness consider things as they really are, without looking to the sentiments of others, or being driven about by them, that so having sure grounds in thyself to stand upon, thou mayst have something of thy own procured by the experimental knowledge of the living operation of light and truth in thine heart, to recommend thee to a place of substantial safety and true stability, in the midst of more and more approaching storms. I subscribe myself thy real friend, but not in the smallest degree to influence thee or any one in my favour.

JOHN ROGERS, Junr.

Lisburn: 12th mo. 1800.

The first of these is the fact that the
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SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

ON

REVELATION, THE SCRIPTURES, RELIGION,

MORALITY, AND SUPERSTITION;

AND

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING PROPER IDEAS

ON THESE SUBJECTS.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

BY JOHN BURNET

IN TWO VOLUMES

LONDON, Printed by J. Sturges, in the Strand, 1724.

MDCCXXIV.

WHEN I first addressed the public in my late pamphlets, entitled, "Reasons for withdrawing from Society with the People called Quakers," and "Additional Observations, being intended as a Sequel to the Reasons," I had previously resolved against making any controversial reply, to any thing which might be advanced in opposition to my sentiments. I still continue in the same mind, because I find controversy has mostly an unprofitable effect on the parties respectively, who engage in it, and because the public is not likely to be edified by the altercation that frequently takes place, in which the disputants, like dextrous fencers, try who shall display most skill in attack and defence, instead of endeavouring to find out truth by a cool examination of each other's sentiments. I therefore, as before, decline entering into a more particular discussion of two pamphlets, which since my last publication have appeared in answer to me, than barely to notice them in the following brief manner:—

The first is entitled, "Remarks on my Reasons," and is anonymous. I think the author meets my objections in many instances with superficial reasonings, and does not enter so fully into them, as to remove them. Besides, I think he is frequently deficient in candour in his remarks. I decline saying more, for the reasons I have already adduced against controversy—and the attentive reader, who is so inclined, may on a careful perusal of my pamphlets, and the Remarks, be satisfied for himself, of the justice or error of my present observations respecting this writer.

Another letter has been addressed to me by Job Rider. The author thinks it right to manifest zeal. Some writers seem almost to think, that they do well to be angry on such occasions. In the account he gives of the conversation he had with me, he mistakes the reply I made to him, and sets down an awkward, ambiguous phrase which I did not use; my answer twice repeated to him was, that *I was not convinced my sentiments were erroneous, and therefore I could not retract them.* I mention this circumstance merely that my answer may appear as I gave it, without intending any reflection on Job Rider, only for his want of accuracy in stating my words,

words:—I think it not amiss to state in this place, a remark which I made to him in the course of the conversation which we had together, because I think it may be useful to throw it out for general observation.—He was speaking of the danger of encouraging libertinism, by unsettling what had commonly been received for truth.—I replied, that I thought I did no injury, by calling people to examine on what foundation their religion rested; but that those were doing the real injury to the cause of godliness, who attempted to build religion on what is not a solid foundation, and to connect together what are so dissimilar in their nature, truth and error.

It may be well observed, in the words of a late writer, that “the worst *heresy* is a *bad life*—that no *church* can be in *danger*, which has no corruptions in it, and that the only *atonement* for our sins is repentance and amendment.” If we become fully assured of these great leading truths, which would serve us as guides in the course of our examination, we need not fear to examine closely into the foundation on which religion is built. If some things should be found not to have a solid foundation, which we fondly supposed were immovable, still truth would gain additional stability, and we as individuals should be benefitted by the research.

I again appear before the public to lay before them some considerations, the result of free but serious enquiry, on some very important subjects. Much outcry has been raised against me on account of my sentiments, which I have already published. But I cannot consent to yield to popular prejudice in giving them up, until I am convinced they are erroneous. I therefore purpose in the ensuing pages to enter into a more full enquiry; and endeavour in simplicity to state my apprehensions on these matters of a most highly interesting nature. I am conscious of no other motive but a sincere desire to promote the cause of truth: and I only ask of the reader to give a patient hearing, with his mind divested of prejudice, and an unreasonable attachment to pre-conceived opinions. I wish him neither hastily to receive nor reject. I appeal not to his passions, but to his cool, deliberate judgment.

SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS,

&c.

ON REVELATION.

BEFORE we attempt to explain ourselves on any particular subject, it is necessary we should affix an accurate meaning to what we form as our idea of it. Many confine the meaning of this word to a literal belief in the scriptures—the Quakers, among whom I was educated, appear not to have defined their ideas very clearly on this subject; some of them extended the meaning farther, by taking in a communication immediately from God, made manifest in the heart of every man. They connected the two ideas together, some leaning more to one side of the explanation, and some to the other, according to their respective apprehensions.

I think it is necessary in the first place to come to a clear understanding on this point, as a preliminary to further observation. According to the judgment which I have formed, there is no book which comes up to the idea of a revelation: if even it were written under the influence of inspiration at first, it comes to us through the hands of a multitude of copyists, translators, &c. The large commentaries written from time to time on the Bible, the corrections of erroneous readings and translations frequently made in its text, prove that it is not a certain standard. We may see a striking instance of the uncertainty arising from interpolation, in the passage in I. John, v. 7 and 8, respecting the three witnesses. It was long contended that these verses were genuine, but now they are almost universally given up as spurious, even by those writers who are strenuous for the doctrine attempted to be supported by them. Here is one acknowledged instance of an interpolation, and why may there not be other instances of similar frauds of earlier date?

In my apprehension, the scriptures are attended throughout with much uncertainty. As they stand in the present volume,
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they come to us in a questionable shape, collected together by some general councils, of the members of which we know but little, and therefore we cannot answer for their integrity, or qualifications to judge—they appear to have received some, and rejected others, in an arbitrary manner, at least we are unacquainted with the motives which influenced their choice. It seems reasonable to conclude that they had their prejudices, to which they would probably cause their selection to bend; so in every step there appears to be uncertainty concerning these writings. It may have happened, that the original writers admitted a mixture of error incident to human frailty into their writings, and these errors may have been increased by the various channels through which they have since passed.

It were easy to enlarge on this subject, but I wish to avoid giving much way to conjecture, and I think sufficient may be perceived to shew that they do not bear the marks of such a certain only rule, as we could suppose to be appointed by God for the entire regulation of his creatures; and if they were a certain all-sufficient rule, that he would leave a large proportion of the inhabitants of this earth in every age necessarily ignorant of them. A law revealed by God must be universal, clear, and open to all; and not dependent on the accidental circumstances of situation, or ability to read it in its original or translated form. If an all-wise being had intended written records should be a key to the true knowledge of him, I think he would have caused them to be universally dispersed, and have preserved them free from all mixture of error; neither of which is evidently the case with regard to the scriptures.

I forbear in this place to enter more fully into this subject, by stating my objections to particular passages in these writings—I have already done so in my former publications, and intend to resume the subject in the succeeding chapter. - All I aim at now is to shew that they are not a certain rule, and therefore fall far short of what I conceive to be the essential requisites of a revelation proceeding from God for the sole direction of man.

Some have declared the works of nature as they are seen in the creation to be the true revelation. I cannot subscribe to this doctrine in its full extent. We may truly consider this display of the visible creation as a revelation, or discovery of an all-mighty and all-intelligent power, to us dim-sighted creatures, who even regarding these things after all our searching can know

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but very little. Whether we turn our attention to the great, or to the minute parts of creation, after most diligent investigation, to the utmost extent of human intellect, we must confess our great ignorance when we compare what we do know, with what we find we are incapable of knowing. We may learn humility by seeing ourselves placed so low in the scale of intelligence. I cannot perceive how this knowledge of the outward creation, even if we had greater capabilities of comprehending it, would lead us to a clear knowledge of our moral duties. We still have something farther to seek. If this were the true clue to a sure revelation, the learned would have an advantage over the unlearned, which we do not find to be verified either by reason or fact. We do not find that the most learned in this way are better instructed in their moral duties than others who have made these researches less their study—in some cases this kind of knowledge puffs up the mind of its possessor, and then it proves of real injury to him, instead of affording any profitable instruction; and I cannot believe otherwise than that God is just in all his ways, and places it equally in the power of all, learned or unlearned, to become acquainted with his laws.

Learning to a certain degree has a tendency to open the capacities of the human mind, and knowledge is certainly more favourable to enlarged ideas of true religion than ignorance; but science may be too far followed so as to divert the mind from the necessary attention to our duties, and instead of being kept in its proper place as a mean by enlarging the understanding to lead to a clear comprehension of our duties, it may become hurtful, if it be rested in as an end. A man may be a skilful mathematician, or a knowing astronomer, and yet unacquainted with what most interests him to know. An intimate knowledge of himself would be more useful to him in assisting him to regulate his passions, and fulfil the great business of living soberly, righteously and godly.

“ Knowledge dwells

- “ In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
- “ Wisdom in minds attentive to their own;
- “ Knowledge—a rude, unprofitable mass,
- “ The mere materials with which Wisdom builds,
- “ ’Till smooth’d, and squar’d, and fitted to its place,
- “ Does but incumber whom it seems t’enrich.”

COWPER.

Here now we have tried two systems of what is called revelation: the advocates of each are opposed to the other—in my view both are deficient; but let us not hastily renounce the further enquiry, either through carelessness about the object, or a predilection for one or other of these modes. I most firmly believe in revelation, though I freely acknowledge that I receive neither the scriptures, nor the works of the creation as the true source of it. I have no desire to lead the judgment of others, hastily to adopt my opinions. I request my reader carefully to examine every step as he proceeds, and to receive nothing upon trust. As the only object I have in view is the search after truth, and the firm establishment of it, I earnestly caution against an unweighed adoption of what is truth, for I believe the lasting impression made upon the mind, is in proportion to the earnestness and care with which the preceding examination is conducted. Hasty impressions are seldom lasting, and I have seen some who hastily received on light grounds, as rashly again reject on motives as light. Conviction may be compared to a plant of slow growth, but which, when deeply rooted, continues long to keep possession in full vigour.

It sometimes happens that men overlook the simple and obvious cause in their search after a more remote one. Revelation is a simple inward principle in the heart—open to all, which all may understand, and of which each individual possesses the key himself, because his knowledge depends upon his obedience. It is the free gift, the grace of God, the improvable talent committed to man's stewardship. In proportion as he attends to its intimations, he becomes more acquainted with it. It operates on the mind through the medium of the conscience. Many times indeed its sacred intimations are disregarded, and often this holy principle, pure in itself, is mixed with human errors, and the workings of the imagination. Hence we sometimes see that superstition in part, or entirely, usurps the place of conscience, and persons ignorantly follow imagination for the dictates of conscience; yet this does not derogate from the true value of this inestimable gift. It is the great business of our lives to observe closely its warnings, and by watchful attention to its leadings to separate truth from error. I assuredly believe we may approach gradually to a more full capacity for this necessary work—and though the dross of human error may remain among the pure metal, yet we find some make a nearer approach to a state of purity than

than others, and this is only brought about through a close attention to this ray of the divinity in man. Man on one side is allied to frailty and infirmity, and on the other, as he obeys this principle of instruction, he becomes allied to the divine nature: for I consider this principle as the germ of immortality, gradually unfolding according to the gracious design of the planter of it. But all depends on man's joining in with it—he may through disobedience stifle its convictions for a season; he may through inadvertence mistake its dictates, or in the pride of his heart he may overlook its simple appearance: but in all these instances, man is to blame. He, by his own wilful neglect, loses the benefits of the intended good.

So here, I think, we have a principle divine in its nature, extended to every age and every country, to all nations and to every individual; and from whose beneficial offers, neither bond nor free, learned nor unlearned, civilized nor uncivilized, are exempted. All hear; but all do not obey. The possession of the scriptures has only reached to a small part of mankind; but here we have a revelation communicated to all. It is certain in its effects. Many may pervert and mistake its communications, and remain ignorant of their real state through the influence of an inordinate self-love; but this impulse, partaking of the essence of its divine author, is without variableness, or shadow of turning.

Much might be said on this subject, but a little may suffice; because all have felt its influence, and unless the inward sensation is lost through repeated violation of it, man can truly say from experience, "I know there is a God, because I feel his influence. I know I am immortal, because a secret consciousness which I cannot describe, but yet which baffles all powers of reasoning, convinces me that I am designed for another state of existence." I think nothing more is requisite to convince us of the power of a God, and of the immortality of the soul, than the internal feelings of his presence in the heart, convincing and awfully reproofing for evil, and speaking peace for faithful obedience. Indeed all nature speaks a God, and even superstition, alas! so powerfully prevalent among mankind, declares his existence; for I consider superstition as an abortive attempt to attain to the knowledge of God.

But above all, God proclaims his power in man; for nothing short of an Almighty Being, acting upon an immortal spirit,

could produce those strong sensations, which at times we experience in our hearts. I trust I am no enthusiast. Some men call me an infidel; but I at seasons can truly rejoice in this feeling of a God nigh at hand. I reject all other revelation than this, and can breathe forth the fervent desire for all mankind, that they might experimentally come, taste and see for themselves, that the Lord is good.

It is the wilful alienation of the mind that prevents the right feeling of this divine power in the heart, and causes poor man to walk in the bye ways, and crooked paths of his own imagination, even while he mistakenly supposes he is walking by the light of what he calls revelation, grasping at the shadow, and losing the substance. Real infidelity has increased, and will increase among men, under this erroneous system, and nothing will stop its progress, not all the puny efforts of man, by his books, his forms, and ceremonies, until mankind recur to first principles, and attend solely to the operations of divine grace—this is the only standard that can profitably be held up to the surrounding nations.

Mankind may differ among themselves about their forms, and attach great importance to their various modes; but notwithstanding, all who do not thus experimentally know God for themselves, will be destitute of the substance and the power of godliness. What avails sending out missionaries to foreign lands among those called Heathens, to tell them of a revelation as yet hid from them in a book? They already, as well as we, have felt the influence of this true revelation. Surely it would be better to stir them up to attend more closely to the discoveries of the internal sense of right and wrong manifested in their minds; for thereby both we and they might become christians in deed and in truth, and we can attain to this state by no other means, notwithstanding we make the highest professions.

I am not insensible of the objections that are made to allowing this internal revelation. Perhaps the cause has been more injured by the mistakes of those, who assumed to be its supporters, than by the attacks of its opponents. Fanaticism has often usurped its name, and all the passions which disturb and deform the human mind, have at seasons clothed themselves under its appearance. Hence it has been said to give no certain intelligence: but the error lies in man, he mixes up his own passions in the cup, and then complains of the whole. He ought
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to have preserved the heavenly cordial pure; and then he would experience its beneficial effects in curing the evils he has fallen into.

I do not scruple to call this divine principle the voice of God manifested through the conscience. Our imagination, or the prejudices of education, which are very difficult to be got rid of, may present objects to us, as matters to be believed in, and practised, that a more enlightened state of mind would reject, and in such instances we may act erroneously under the apprehension of conscience. And if we act so in the honesty of the heart, I doubt not but our sincerity will be accepted by God. But I cannot call such instances the effects of conscience. We may view the act through an imperfect medium, and form a mistaken conclusion while at the same time we preserve our integrity.

Conscience, like every other good thing, may be abused; and hypocrites often shelter themselves under its name. They plead its sanction for the outward formalities they practice, while in the general tenor of their lives, they evidently manifest that they disregard its sacred injunctions. Men have pleaded conscience for the doing or forbearing to do some things, which were only mere acts of superstition, while at the same time they were about to commit the greatest acts of wickedness. Robbers have been known to be fearful of eating fleshmeat on a day forbidden by their ritual, when they were just entering upon scenes of robbery and murder—and some warriors, it is said, have been scrupulous in repeating a prayer to the God of mercy, at the instant they were preparing to do violence to the convictions of his spirit by slaying their fellow men. Such is the deceivableness of the human heart! It often seeks to compound for its great enormities by an attention to trifles! This is the conduct of superstition; but such never was the language of genuine conscience.

Conscience is the gift of God—so also is reason, and as they both proceed from him, so they must be in unison together. Some have attempted to make a distinction between them, but I apprehend it has arisen from not taking a comprehensive view of the subject; some are so narrowed up in their own system, they will see nothing out of it.

In my estimation, conscience is an internal sense of right and wrong communicated to the mind, and it encreases and gains strength

strength in proportion to our adherence to its convictions ; and our sensibility, or perception of it, is always in proportion to our obedience to its former discoveries already made known. Reason comes to its aid—but here again as we see erroneous judgment may usurp the place of conscience, so may false reasonings assume the name of reason. The caprices of the human heart do not flow from reason. Reason, properly defined, comes to the aid of conscience, and confirms its verdict—while prejudice under the guise of conscience, and error assuming the mask of reason, join in leading the mind astray ; but I cannot on this account reject reason, or bring myself to disallow conscience—both have been greatly abused. I think it has been a too common error to set up too many distinctions ; and so they have frequently been without a difference, and man has been puzzled by a labyrinth of his own making.

If pure revelation, unmixed conscience, and sound reason be closely examined, I think they will be found all to proceed from the same source, and if they are not united as one common principle, the error of supposing they may be one and the same thing under different names will not, I expect, be a practical evil ; I acknowledge for my own part, I cannot clearly separate them, and I believe a critical attempt to do so, would partake more of the nature of barren speculation, than of practical utility.

I think, on subjects of this nature, it is becoming our present state of knowledge to speak with diffidence. It is easier to assert with confidence, than to examine with modest caution. I advance these sentiments as the present result of some serious enquiry, but in a matter of such a nature, I may be mistaken ; and therefore I prefer to express myself cautiously, yet I trust I am not under the influence of an over timidity—I only fear to do or say wrong. Many will doubtless from motives widely opposite make contrary assertions. Some may think I am surrendering the cause of immediate revelation ; and others of opposite sentiments may account me an enthusiast in support of it. I believe it right for me to endeavour to hold on the even tenor of my way, alike regardless of unmerited censure, from whatever quarter it may proceed. To find out truth for ourselves independently of an undue attachment to the sentiments of others, ought to be our great concern. And in this search it is more becoming our present state, rather to endeavour to be found in
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the character of humble enquirers after truth, than too easily to yield to our own self-sufficiency, in supposing we have fully found it out. By adopting such a line, our stock of real knowledge would be likely to be further encreased, although at the same time, we might have to abate of some of our high pretensions, respecting our having already got to the entire attainment of this knowledge.

In speaking on these subjects, I think it safest to express words according to my own ideas; and of which, to use a simile, I have measured the length and breadth for myself, without looking to the phrases commonly in use. I am apprehensive that using a set of phrases, the language of a sect, often has a tendency to puzzle, rather than to make clear distinctions on particular subjects. We find language is often very insufficient to convey our ideas to one another clearly; and therefore we should learn to make allowances for each other in this respect, when we find a difficulty in clearly comprehending what is expressed; for we see things in so many different points of view, that it is very difficult to speak so as to accommodate the ideas of all.

We may well sum up the matter, by saying that every gift of God is good, and is committed to us as improvable stewards of his manifold grace. Let us, therefore, instead of mispending our time in nice disquisitions respecting their nature, study to make a good use of these precious gifts, which we must allow come from the source and fountain of all good: and in this point of view gratitude must arise in every feeling mind, that we have a practical guide, and are not left to grope our way through the intricate mazes of this life, unassisted; that this guide is equal to every exigency, and is not locked up in a book, or in the keeping of any church or body of men whatever; but is equally open to all the children of the one common father, that whosoever will, may read in the book of this great law written in every heart, and which is distinctly legible, until it be defaced by transgression.

How does this idea raise the mind above the puny considerations of particular sects, names and nations, when we contemplate a divine principle free as the air, and coextensive with the universe! In this point of view, all the petty distinctions invented by man to gratify his pride, as if he and his party were the peculiar favourites of heaven, vanish out of sight, and the soul is
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wrapt up in humble adoration, and may almost be said to be "lost in wonder, love and praise." In this situation, the language can be feelingly adopted, "Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift."

ON THE SCRIPTURES.

I HAVE in the preceding chapter brought forward some observations, by which I am induced to believe, that these writings do not bear internal marks of being throughout a revelation from God; and have pointed out the many uncertainties and difficulties attendant on the channel, through which they have come to our hands.

I view them as a large collection of writings, promiscuously brought together without discrimination. They do not appear to have been written with similar views, and by no means form an uniform whole. Historical relations occupy a considerable space in them, and they partake of the evils usually to be met with in history, wherein wars and other crimes are spoken of with approbation. But what makes this history more hurtful, is the peculiar stamp of sanctity attempted to be affixed to it.—It, in common with the rest, is called Holy. The book is called by some, the Word of God, and received as a revelation immediately proceeding from him. The Quakers have not been accustomed to call them by this appellation, and sometimes appear startled at the expression, nevertheless most among them stick up strenuously for titling them, *Holy Scriptures*, and *the Scriptures of Truth*. For my part, I can see little difference between these expressions and calling them the Word of God; I think the difference lies more in words, than in any real distinction between those modes of expression.

I think the history of the Jews, as related in these books, has had an injurious tendency in many points of view. The Jews themselves appear to have been induced by these their national historical records, to have assumed in different periods a spirit of haughty arrogance, and to have been led away by the hurtful idea of their being the peculiar favourites of heaven, though I think it appears abundantly manifest, that their general conduct was very different from what would be the distinguishing marks belonging to a people, who were justly entitled to the character of
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being "the people of God." I cannot acquiesce in the supposed divine origin of their law. I think it was framed by Moses according to the ideas which he had formed; and thus having settled it in his own mind, he wished, according to the manners of the times, to add a supernatural sanction to it, in the eyes of his people. Therefore I think it is fair, that we should examine it, as we would do any other system of legislation.

I think, in the ten commandments, an attentive reader, unbiassed by former prejudices, will perceive exceptionable matter. In many parts of the scriptures, as well as in this particular place, the supreme source of all perfection is represented as being influenced with human passions—here he is said to be "a *jealous God*, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those that hate him."—Can this be true? I believe not. What means the expression of the Lord resting on the seventh day? In the fifth commandment the reward promised for doing well is, that "thy days may be *long* in the land."—I think we have no reason to suppose from what we see in the world, that long life is a mark of divine approbation.

I consider the Jews with all their vaunted superiority to have been but little enlightened with regard either to their moral duties, or to entertaining clear ideas respecting the attributes of God; and in this sense their dispensation or state may be said to have been a low one. I believe that there was no change in the laws of God, for they remain unchangeable; nor any different dispensation, but what was occasioned by the introduction of a purer religion, of which Jesus Christ was the chosen and especial messenger to promulgate; and this in my view is what alone constitutes the difference between what is called the Jewish and Christian, or gospel dispensation. Through both the positive will of God was the same; but in different ages of the world men have changed. At some times they have attended more closely to that divine principle which illuminates the understanding, and this has caused some ages, and some individuals in different ages, to be more enlightened than others; but my mind revolts at the idea, which I cannot but consider as absurd, that in one period God should have given one rule for the people to attend to, and in another period he should have changed this law. Assuredly the change has been in man, and not in God.

The general tendency of the Jewish law almost altogether pointing to ritual observations, does not appear well calculated to have had

had the effect of leading the people to the practice of sound morality, or teaching them to form enlarged ideas of a great first cause, the creator and upholder of all things.—How unmeaning and trifling are most of the ceremonies! I do not think by any means that Moses was divinely inspired in establishing them—yet there are some good moral institutions in the Jewish law. Many attempts have been made, in different ages, and among various sects, to allegorize these ceremonies, and to draw allusions from them, adapted to what they considered the purposes of christianity; but I suppose any other history, or any other law might have equally served as a basis for such typical, and, in many instances, fanciful allusions.

Many circumstances in the conduct of Jacob appear irreconcilable with the principles of justice. The same may, in some cases, be said of Joseph, though some of his actions are truly commendable; and yet his conduct towards the Egyptians in taking their cattle and lands from them for the use of Pharaoh, during the years of scarcity, I think cannot be considered as an act of genuine mercy; but in my view stamps on him the character of a sordid monopolizer, as his plan seems more calculated to promote the interests of Pharaoh and the priesthood, than the real relief of the people. See Genesis xlvii.—In what point of view should we have beheld the conduct of any individual or government, who should have acted in such a manner during the late season of pinching scarcity? Yet the nature of this transaction is not changed, because it happened in a distant age of the world, and is recorded in the Bible. I do not call in question that these and other similar transactions really happened, but there is great difference between admitting this to be the case, and believing that these things took place in consequence of a divine command, or that the authors of these books were inspired to record them, as examples for us to follow; and I think I am warranted in the assertion, that in the manner many of these things are spoken of, they are held up to us as models for imitation by the writers, and consequently by those who in the present day assert these writings to be throughout the dictates of inspiration.

I am not deterred from stating my sentiments explicitly on these subjects, either on account of the general odium thrown upon them who advance such opinions, or of the fear of being classed among those who have hitherto propagated them, because many have not manifested in their general conduct that they were of
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virtuous or godly lives. I admit that Voltaire and other men of relaxed morals may have held similar sentiments—they partook of the general state of defective morality, alas! too common among every class; but this circumstance by no means proves the unsoundness of the doctrine they have adopted. It would be as uncandid to form such a judgment, as to assert that all religion was false, on account of the gross hypocrisy so conspicuous among many of its apparently zealous supporters: yet I acknowledge the fear of being ranked with men whose general conduct I highly disapproved, operated with considerable weight on my mind for some time, against an over hasty avowal of my sentiments; but after a deliberate consideration of this and every other circumstance attendant on an honest, candid declaration of my sentiments, I believed it to be my duty to submit to every reproach in the discharge of the debt, which it appeared to me that I owed to my fellow men, by stating my opinion, that I might by this means put them upon consideration of what I believe will be found to be a fundamental error, the implicit receiving the scriptures throughout as of divine authority: yet I by no means reject many valuable truths which are contained in them—I neither receive nor reject in bulk.

I also wish carefully to avoid speaking of these subjects lightly, or with the smallest approach to ridicule; but to treat of them soberly, as is most becoming in examining into matters so highly important in their nature, for so I consider every thing which so nearly concerns the best interests of man, as the serious investigation of truth: besides, ridicule is not the test of truth; for things true beyond all contradiction may be turned into ridicule, equally with those of a contrary nature. I consider religion (when this word is properly understood in its right meaning) to be of such vast importance to us all, that I dare not jest even with the errors which have been interwoven with it, and which in many cases have usurped its sacred name. I wish to guard myself, and to caution others against that superficial frivolity of mind, which I fear is too common in the present day. Neither do I bring forward instances of what I consider inconsistencies out of the scriptures from a carping disposition, desirous only to find fault, but to shew why I think the Bible ought not to be received with implicit confidence; and that many of the instances recorded in it with the appearance of approbation ought not to be held up as models for our imitation. If we view them only

as representations of the manners of former times, without attaching further importance to them, they may furnish us with additional proofs of the prevalence of human errors; but if they are still held up as patterns of excellency, such a system will powerfully operate to prevent further improvement, by turning the attention of the people to look backwards to the precedents of former times; whereas I think it would be better to look forwards—the history of most of the past is not very consoling—let us hope for more enlightened times to succeed!

Let us next take a short view of the character of David. The psalms which go under his name contain many sublime truths, expressed in beautiful terms, yet they are not without their alloy of pernicious error. Read the 109th psalm, and compare it with the language of the holy Jesus, “Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.” Matt. v. 44.

In forming a just estimate of the character of David, we cannot avoid taking into view his dying charge to Solomon (I. Kings, ii. 5 and 8) to be revenged of Joab and Shimei, for offences they had committed against him several years before. Do we not perceive in this charge a spirit of cool-blooded, deliberate revenge? Yet these things, and many other similar instances, are mentioned in these writings, without any mark of disapprobation being affixed to them. Wretched indeed would be the situation of poor man, if all this must be taken as the word of God, and a sure revelation inspired by him! But thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift; he hath implanted a principle in every heart, which, when its genuine intimations are attended to, rises as a witness against the enormity of such things*. Yet many sincere men,

* The late Alexander Geddes, who had begun a new translation of the scriptures, of which he had published two volumes, with critical remarks, and had proceeded in his work as far as the 118th psalm, when he was a few weeks ago removed by death, in speaking of the destruction of the Canaanites, thus expresses himself:—

“After all that has been written, either by Jews or Christians, in defence of this sanguinary measure, I confess that my reason and my religion continually revolt at it; and I cannot bring myself to believe that such an order proceeded from the mouth of God; perhaps not even from the mouth of Moses. I am rather willing to suspect that it is the fabrication of some posterior Jew, to justify the cruelties of his nation. And indeed it is the shortest way to justify any measure, and to obviate all troublesome objections. Such a command could not be unjust, since God authorized and

men, with mistaken views, suppose these writings to be the foundation of all true religion. Surely they are doing great injury to the cause they think they are supporting. If religion had no other foundation than what they are giving to it, it must fall. I think those who point out the instability of this foundation, and are desirous to turn the attention of the people to one which is indeed secure, the rock of true revelation, are labouring to promote the essential interests of mankind. I do not entertain a doubt, but that these things will ere long be more fully seen into, every unsound foundation will be shaken, and that only which cannot be shaken will remain.

There appears great diversity in the writings of the prophets, and some of them express purer sentiments than others; yet there are many things in their writings which appear incomprehensible and inconsistent with our ideas of rectitude. They had a particular idiom of expression, "Thus saith the Lord," often repeated, which I think is not fully understood. It was the common eastern manner; but I do not think their assertion can be accepted as a proof, that always when they used this term, the Lord actually spoke by them. I do not deny but in some instances they were as instruments to convey profitable instruction to the people, but still I think I perceive a mixture of much imperfection in their writings, and therefore I cannot accept them, as communicating the unmixed language of sound sentiment. I do not wish to detract from their real merit; they may have possessed some valuable qualities; and perhaps their language and ministration were better understood in that day. But I think it improper that an attempt should be made in this day, to enforce an implicit belief in their writings. We are commanded by sects to receive them entire without examination. I think it is much more reasonable, and

commanded it; who will presume to say, that what God commands is unjust? True; but then we must be first well assured, that he has commanded—and the very appearance of injustice in the act, is to me a stronger proof that he did not command it, than the authority of all the Jewish historians put together."—*Preface to vol. II. of the Translation.*

The same author, in the preface to his critical remarks on the scriptures, makes the following observations:—

"Catholic christianity I revere, wherever I find it, and in whatsoever sect it dwells; but I cannot revere the loads of hay and stubble, which have been blended with its precious gems; and which still, in every sect with which I am acquainted, more or less tarnish or hide their lustre."

that it would be more likely to answer the ends of true piety, that these writings should be canvassed, and treated as other books are. Let us draw what instruction we can, from such parts of them as we are able to understand, or that seem adapted to the present circumstances; and leave the other parts to fall by their demerit. I wish to acknowledge truth, in whatever place I meet with it. But I think the error lies in attempting to throw a veil of mystery over these writings, which no one is allowed to look under.

We often hear the assertion, that the scriptures are to be considered as a sealed book. I can look upon this declaration only as an acknowledgment, that many parts of them are incomprehensible, and that they are no otherwise explicable than by viewing them as an allegory, by which it is attempted sometimes to reconcile them; but I do not believe that God would cause that to be veiled in mystery, which was necessary for us to know. I think the scripture writers adopted the phraseology common in that day, which now, through a change of manners and language, appears very uncouth to us; and in some cases it evidently appears that they acted in an extravagant manner. If Isaiah going naked and barefooted, (see chap. xx.), and Hosea, (chap. i.) taking a wife of whoredoms, and having children of whoredoms, are to be considered in a literal sense, I think the one is inconsistent with decency, and the other with morality, and therefore, that neither were done by divine command. If they are to be taken in a figurative sense, the expressions are too strong to be instructive in that way; and if they really believed they were acting by divine command, they must certainly have been under the influence of a strong fanaticism. In either case I can see no advantage in the relation.

I could bring forward several other instances of inconsistencies mentioned in the writings of the prophets, but I forbear that I may not be tedious, and as every reader may find them out for himself; and now proceed to enquire a little how these writings came to be so implicitly relied on. I think we may trace the cause to that indolence which forms a most striking feature in the human character. The worldling and the sensualist are both too indolent to occupy their time in the serious search after truth—they take things upon trust, sooner than detach their minds from their main pursuits:—if they can but make money, and go on in their dream of pleasure, they willingly allow others to think for them; and

in return for this implicit belief in the doctrines of their sect, they expect, if they do not act altogether according to what conscience whispers to them in their cool moments, that this traditional belief in certain opinions and creeds, which they call faith, will gain them acceptance. Thus they are set at ease in their sins by delusive hopes, that by substituting this faith for sound practice, all will be well—a substitute befitting their indolence! Others of more seriousness are seduced by sloth and a kind of timidity, afraid to expose themselves to censure, by breaking through the trammels of a sect—thus, if any thought comes across them, which is likely to unsettle their long-imbibed prejudices, they hasten to turn it out, lest their rest should be disturbed, and they led into a further train of thinking, which would not suit their so much wished-for repose.

There is another powerful obstruction to free enquiry. Many are so pleased with all their own performances, they cannot bear to let in a doubt, that the things they have practised, could be wrong; and here indolence joined with self-complacency obstructs further enquiry, and error is attempted to be consecrated by former practice. Few claim in words infallibility for themselves, yet many claim it in reality, if we examine closely their conduct. How few are willing candidly to allow that they have been mistaken in their former apprehensions, and rather than acknowledge it, they go on in the old track! From these causes free examination is frequently slurred over—a consciousness of wrong conduct makes cowards of some, they say they are not fit to make this enquiry, and such characters often find rest from their scruples, by reposing on formality.

To some I may appear to dwell with tediousness on these subjects; but I think it is profitable to suggest the necessity of an individual enquiry, that all may search into the motives which actuate them to receive or to reject opinions. For want of a strict scrutiny of this kind, the motives which influence many remain hidden from themselves, so that, independent of the justice of the sentiments which I have advanced, there may be a use in putting people upon an examination into their various motives; which enquiry, if seriously entered into, will prove of advantage to them.

Thus from one cause or another, many go on in their accustomed track; some keep in it, because they have been habituated to it, and many quote the scriptures merely from former practice; they have heard them quoted by others, they themselves quoted them,

and they go on without examination. To these causes I attribute it, that the many glaring inconsistencies in them, are not more generally seen into—besides, people are deterred from looking; it has been accounted a kind of sacrilegious attempt to think they have not throughout a holy origin; and thus all free examination into their real merits has been stopt. Another cause inciting to greater timidity in this case, is, that some, who have attacked these writings, have not been persons of upright conduct in the general tenor of their lives; and others have been afraid to appear to be in such company. It is too common to confound together persons very dissimilar in their conduct and sentiments on other subjects, only because on some particular point they concurred in the same opinion; yet I think no dread of a censure of this kind from the unthinking multitude, should deter conscientious minds from publishing their sentiments, and attempting even at the loss of personal reputation, to disabuse the world of errors, however strongly they may appear to be sanctioned by long and implicit reception.

To oppose popular errors is the certain way to incur loss of reputation in the eyes of many, but is of trifling consequence indeed, when the mind is supported by an internal consciousness of endeavouring to follow in sincerity after rectitude. Truth ought to be boldly told at the expence of personal reputation. This kind of reproach in an especial manner attended Jesus Christ in the course of his ministry—the Jews reviled and persecuted him, and such has been the lot of reformers in every age, in one shape or another.

I think the language of the scriptures is in many respects very ambiguous, and liable to be misunderstood; and therefore does not possess that clearness which we may safely conclude God would have appointed, if they had been the primary rule of faith and practice. They are often tortured to make them appear to have whatever meaning the reader chuses to affix to them. Different readers will often draw directly opposite conclusions from the same passages.

Many parts of them have been applied often in a fanciful manner in every age to the passing occurrences of the day, and this has been called their fulfilment; and by this means writers have bewildered themselves in a labyrinth of their own ideas. Behold the crowd of commentators, and others of this class, who have uselessly employed their time in writing volume upon volume, employing themselves in laboriously doing nothing—attempting

to explain what they did not understand, and forcing every thing to bend to their own system. True religion, which in its nature is simple and plain, has been only obscured by these writers. The sum of true religion may be expressed in a few comprehensive words, "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly;" and requires not the aid of bulky volumes to explain it—its genuine law is witnessed in every heart.

Some decry conscience by attempting to say it speaks differently in different persons. I have before endeavoured to shew, what I consider to be the cause of this mistake. Men vary; but the genuine dictates of conscience are, I believe, the same in all. Its province is not to direct respecting forms and ceremonies, and because men have differed respecting these, and each party generally supposed their mode to spring exclusively from the real dictates of conscience, they have hence attributed to it, their own uncertainties; but in unfolding the great matters of the law of mercy and of justice, essentially necessary for man to attend to in his conduct—it uniformly is found to speak the same in all.

In this case, there is an agreement of sentiment in all sincere minds. On the great duties of mercy and justice mankind are generally agreed, though seduced by their passions; they do not always act up to their better feelings. This circumstance proves, in my view, the clearness and importance of the impressions made in the mind of man by what I call a sure revelation from God, acting upon his conscience. The sense of his essential duties man receives from a superior source, and I believe it will be found that among all nations, whether civilized or those called barbarous, there is a stronger affinity of sentiment on these important points than many are aware of. The genuine dictates of conscience, unpolluted by the mixture of evil habits and prevailing prejudices, speak the same language in every nation and in every country. Other prepossessions respecting his external forms, man finds in the workings of his own imagination; and here, as may be expected, there is much uncertainty.

He would rather attend to trivialities, and from his inordinate self-love attaches importance to his conceptions, respecting what he supposes to be essential. He differs with his neighbour about forms, and sets up the plea of conscience, for practices which genuine conscience never had any thing to do with. Thus man obscures, by his erroneous conceptions, what is clear in itself.

In a day, when bigotry, superstition, and libertinism, assisting mutually to produce each other, were eminently conspicuous among the Jews, in the two rival sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees, into which that nation was divided, a teacher sent from God, Jesus Christ, appeared. He testified against the errors of each, without accepting the person of any man, and for his plain dealing, and zealously testifying against evil, let it appear in whom it might, he was reproached, persecuted, and finally put to death by the hands of ungodly men. There have been many disquisitions, more curious than useful, made respecting his nature, &c. Volumes of controversy have been written with the greatest asperity, and the sword has been drawn in the name of the God of peace, on account of speculations of this kind; and after all we must leave the matter undecided. How distressing to a feeling mind, to read of the errors of mankind, exemplified in the long list of controversies excited under various names, Athanasian, Arian, Socinian, and many more besides, the very names of which it is tedious to recite. They made distinctions, divisions, and subdivisions; contending fiercely about a particular manner of expression, and even sometimes about a single letter,

“ And found no end, in wand’ring mazes lost.”

I cannot view these contests in any other light than as hurtful contentions, about fruitless speculations on subjects, which after all they did not comprehend. For although in one point of view man is capable of taking in a pretty wide extent of knowledge in some things useful for him to be acquainted with, and above all is assisted by the light of conscience to comprehend his moral duty, and needs not to be perplexed with nice subtleties on this score, unless he wilfully steps out of the path through his own mistake, and an abuse of his free agency, yet in many other cases he must acknowledge his ignorance—but then it is not necessary that we should know these abstruse speculations; for the most exact knowledge of them would not assist us in the line of religiously performing our duty. We must necessarily remain ignorant of many things in this state of existence, after all our searching. Such are many of the things belonging to our nature—we can comprehend but little of our own mental frame. But man’s business is not to pry too curiously with a scrutinizing eye, but to endeavour to act well; and for this purpose, he is graciously assisted with the means.

means. As we know but little of our own nature, so our limited faculties are not capable of prying into the nature of God. The subject is beyond our comprehensions, though many have attempted to write and speak so familiarly on it. I think it ought to suffice us to know that there is a God, by the universal voice of nature, and above all, by his immediate revelation, and the display of his power in the heart of man.

All beyond this must be conjecture, and it would have been happy for the peace of mankind, and have tended to the interest of the cause of real godliness, if none had attempted to have gone farther. The world would then have been spared the many questions about names, and the long disputes about trinity, substances, subsistencies, and a long train of unintelligible terms, invented principally as badges of party distinctions. The inventors of these terms appear frequently not to have understood them themselves, and this was reasonably to be expected, when they attempted to explain things beyond mortal ken.

The world has been long occupied by these barren speculations to their great injury—and I venture to express my hope, that the time will come when these controversies will be laid at rest; and that mankind, profiting by their former errors, will be careful not to revive them under other forms, or names; for if they should attempt to set up new distinctions, a little differing from the former ones, then the last error would be as bad as the first.

I expect many will account me very irreligious for my speaking in this manner. This I willingly submit to, as a tax laid by man on his brother, for yielding obedience to the dictates of his conscience. While I decry speculation in others, I wish equally to guard against giving way to it myself. The drift of my present observations is not to stir up strife on these points, but to turn the attention from an attempt, which I consider so unprofitable.

Consistently with these sentiments, I again forbear to enter into a disquisition respecting the person of Christ. I think I have good grounds to reject the doctrine of original sin, arising from any transgression of Adam; and I think I have equally solid grounds to reject the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which appears to have been assumed to do away the taint supposed to be communicated from the former. This doctrine I conceive to be a dangerous one, and subversive of true practical godliness. If it only were a mere speculative matter of opinion, I would leave it; but I think it tends most injuriously to influence

practice. It has lulled thousands and tens of thousands asleep, in a state of security, while they have indulged this delusive dream. They lived in sin, and vainly hoped grace would abound through this imputed righteousness; and their teachers in a general way have contributed to keep up this dangerous error. They more frequently called upon them to have what they called a sound belief, laying too much stress on this point, instead of duly enforcing an attention to sound practice as the essential duty: and thus preachers and hearers went on smoothly together. The people were pleased at this easy, and, as some called it, comfortable doctrine, of living in sin, dying in the harness, and yet thinking that all was made up through a sound belief, or, as they improperly termed it, faith.

The preachers got on smoothly. They attempted to satisfy their own minds, by persuading themselves they had discharged their duty; by holding up this doctrine to their hearers as a sure and effectual remedy, and by this means they retained more of the praise of men, than if they had boldly ventured to tell the people plainly their transgressions. They sometimes attempted indeed to frighten them by warm expressions working on their passions, but then they held out this easy remedy, and that if they joined their party, and believed in what they told them, all would be well. This was like to a shrill alarm and a lullaby in the same breath. I believe many of the teachers of the people have caused them to err. It is time both for priests and people to look to themselves respectively.

Many, especially among the teachers, in every sect, oppose any measures which might lead to a strict investigation of the principles commonly and implicitly received among them. They are afraid of the diminution of their power in one shape or another. Some unwilling to lose their pecuniary emoluments, and with very few exceptions all are afraid of their influence and importance being lessened: thus the leading members among every society endeavour to stop the progress of free enquiry and real reformation. They are ready to hurl their anathemas, and denounce their woes against all who differ from them, boldly asserting without proof, that they are under the influence of a dangerous error. All sects, how much so ever they may differ from one another in other respects, agree in this point.

Openly avowed persecution for religious opinions, is rather out of fashion in the present day; but yet many, actuated by the
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same spirit which led to persecution, in order to stop dissent from established modes, have recourse to the more covert way of attempting to load with reproach such who dare to think for themselves, and to insinuate that they are actuated by unworthy motives in their adopting the sentiments which they believe it right for them on full deliberation to avow. But all will not do. I am thoroughly persuaded that a spirit of liberal enquiry will make progress, notwithstanding the many obstructions which may be thrown in the way; for I believe light and knowledge will increase, and break and dissipate the dark clouds that have obscured the human mind, and estranged, alas! too long estranged man from his fellow.

I believe Christ was a teacher sent from God, divinely commissioned to publish the gospel, to preach repentance to man, and to direct to the all-sufficiency of divine grace; but without presuming to enter into a minute disquisition into the nature of his person or his divine mission, I content myself with looking to him as a pattern of unblemished excellence; believing it to be the acceptable duty of the christian to endeavour to follow his footsteps; and that in doing so, he better fulfils what is required of him, than in speculating respecting his nature. If he attempts to examine into the latter, he will be perplexed by contradictions, which he can by no other way unravel than by implicit belief; and after all his search, if we may judge from others, who have busied and lost themselves in similar speculations, he is not likely to gain any accession of true godliness by all his pains, but rather he is likely to suffer loss by his attention being turned from pursuing the one thing needful, the steady attention to the subjecting of his will, and the regulating of his passions.

I think it best for the reasons I have now assigned, to decline entering into a farther critical examination of the books of the Old and New Testament, though I think in many places they leave room for much animadversion, which an attentive reader, with a mind freed from prejudice, may discover for himself without much pains being taken to point them out. I fear so much falling into the line of a disputant, that I wish to shorten my remarks, and state them as briefly as I can.

I am willing to acknowledge, that many sublime and excellent truths are contained in these writings, and my perceiving error in parts does not lessen my acceptance of what is good; but I testify against an implicit adoption of the whole; for it will be found that

that even in the writings of the more enlightened of the apostles, as well as of the prophets, some passages contain more pure sentiments than others. We acknowledge the fallibility of man, and I think it would be just, yea, and I will add advantageous to the cause of real religion, to extend the idea of this fallibility to the scripture writers; and give up what some call the plenary inspiration of the scriptures. I believe the truths contained in them, would be more practically useful, if they were read with this allowance, the errors would be gradually detected, and the sterling worth of the valuable parts would remain. But now it is the fashionable doctrine to say, they must be believed throughout, or rejected altogether. Some say, if a part of them is touched, the whole will fall, and every thing which is valuable will come down with them. Truth does not stand on so insecure a foundation. I think it is sufficiently powerful to throw off error, which may have been blended with it, and instead of being weakened, it gains additional strength by being freed from the injurious mixture.

The implicit adoption of these writings have served for a support of error—each party endeavouring to wrest them to accommodate their own views; so that whether their doctrines could be fairly deduced from them, or not, they did not fail to make them bend in appearance to their favourite scheme; for a written rule or law can be warped on all sides—such is its uncertainty!

The adherence to a written law has a strong tendency to introduce formality. The compliance in appearance with this law is much easier, and more agreeable to the indolence of human nature, than a search after truth, which all must find for themselves in their own minds, by an attention to the superior law of a divine commandment revealed through the medium of the conscience. It requires close searching thus to find out truth, and earnest attention to have our passions subjected; and having to struggle with all the infirmities incident to human frailty, we may mistake; but even so, I do not know that our own errors will be more dangerous to us, than the adopting the errors of others, or even our receiving opinions really true, without knowing for ourselves, whether they are so or not. It is an unsafe situation to be in, not to examine into what we take up as doctrines of religion; for thus we may slide into a situation, wherein we become too indolent,

“ To deem them falsehoods, or to know them truths.”

I think the prevailing error in the present day is an attention to exterior forms, and the ceremonies of what is called religion, while the essential duties are neglected. People satisfy themselves with opinions and a cold belief, which cannot even be called the assent of the understanding. Creeds, and the opinions of sects are cried up, while in my estimation, sound morality is too little attended to, but is postponed in preference to the trivialities of forms; and in this situation, it is common to grasp at any thing, which may be made to look as a plausible substitute for practical right conduct. To this, as one source, I attribute the unweighed adoption of the scriptures. It is easier for people to make strong assertions, without proof or examination, than to examine carefully for themselves. To do the latter with safety and propriety, requires a correspondent line of conduct, which many are unwilling to give themselves the trouble of endeavouring to pursue—they lazily persuade themselves that they believe right—they fancy this will do for them, and give themselves but little trouble about real propriety of conduct.

ON RELIGION AND MORALITY.

HERE again to prevent misrepresentation, and having wrong ideas, it is necessary for us accurately to explain to ourselves what we mean by these terms. To have right ideas, even when we are not about to communicate them to others, we ought to accustom ourselves to affix proper meanings to words, which would assist to keep us from the mistakes to which carelessness in this respect exposes us. Many who can form pretty correct judgments about the trivial concerns of ordinary business, are very deficient in forming accurate conclusions respecting what is of infinitely greater consequence, our duties towards God and man.

Religion then, in my estimation, is not an adherence, however strict, to creeds, opinions, or the outward forms of a society, or what is called a church; but consists in a close attention to the frame of our minds, a strict watchfulness against the influence of our passions, which, if unrestrained, incline us to transgress the boundaries of right in the various bye-ways and devious paths into which they lead the unwary. Religion is not to be estimated
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by the firmness, or rather the obstinacy, of belief adopted without examination, yet this is called faith by some. If we examine into what properly deserves the name of faith, it will be found not to consist in an exterior belief, uninfluential on the conduct, but is an attention to the operation of a divine principle, manifested to man through the medium of his conscience and reason, and never in opposition to the genuine sound dictates of either—they are all divine gifts, and in harmony with each other, until man abuses them, by mistaking and confounding conscience with the erroneous dreams of his fancy, and reason, with the sallies and errors of his imagination: thus, he first abuses the gifts, and then calls his erroneous interpretations of them by their names; and in his rage for making distinctions, which he may turn to his purposes, as party distinctions, he uses divisions and subdivisions for explaining his meaning, until he loses himself by his distinctions in a mist, he surrounds himself with. Thus, he calls a book revelation; faith, a mere belief, or opinion; conscience, an apprehension formed generally from the prejudices of education, sometimes right, and sometimes wrong; reason, a sense to enable him to comprehend what he calls natural objects; and above all to assist him to make gain, which so many consider as the great business of life. The idea affixed to morality is also narrowed to the mere negative qualities of not acting with open fraud, and being free from some of the grosser vices—a meaning falling far short indeed of the comprehensive duties which a sound morality requires.

On the contrary, I conceive revelation to consist in a divine communication made in the heart of all the children of men; and that conscience and reason are its agents, through which it operates on the human mind. Faith is a practical belief in the operation of this principle, and a submission on the part of man to follow its leadings and discoveries; and religion and morality (I cannot separate them) arise from that state of mind, wherein we yield obedience to those impressions of a heavenly stamp made on the mind; not discoverable merely in the superficial effects produced by an assent of the understanding; but operating a powerful effect on the whole tenor of the life and conduct, and producing the fruits of holiness manifested through the general actions of those who submit to its blessed influence. It is not a dead, inactive principle, like a cold belief, but becomes a vivifying principle always inclining us to the right, when we are willing to listen coolly to the lessons which it is ever ready to teach us.

Morality

Morality is not that cold system which some suppose ; they affix an inaccurate meaning to it, and then they find fault with it. It in my view takes in the comprehensive circle of our duties, which we owe to ourselves and to our fellow men, in the various relations, by which, as members of the one great family of mankind, we are connected together. It begins with our more immediate connections, of which the parental and conjugal duties may be put in the first class. I consider these primary duties as the foundation of that benevolence, which in various gradations we owe to all mankind. It would be a deficient species of morality, which would only instruct us to love our kind, if it did lead us in the first instance to the punctual discharge of the duties which we owe to those most immediately connected with us. The proper discharge of our domestic duties ought to be the basis of our general benevolence. Beginning in the domestic circle with those who by their situations have the strongest claims on us, true benevolence proceeds from this centre, and extending to our neighbours, our countrymen, and our brethren of the human race in their various relations, leads to promote universally peace on earth, and good-will towards men.

On the one hand, I call in question the real benevolence of a character, who would profess much general good-will to mankind, and yet neglect to manifest tenderness and kindness in his own domestic circle ; for I consider domestic benevolence (if I may use the expression) to be the only sure foundation of public benevolence, and that no morose, austere character at home, can be truly possessed of general philanthropy.—So, on the other hand, a really beneficent man will not exclusively confine the sphere of his benevolence to his own private family ; it will begin there, but extend far beyond this narrow limit. Yet many content themselves in this situation ; they wish to aggrandize their families, while they are heedless of the duties they owe to others ; and even with regard to their families, fall very short of properly discharging their real duties. Some parents think they have sufficiently discharged their duty to their children if they leave them a large share of riches, while at the same time they have been shewing them an evil example in many respects, training them up in the sordid desire of gain, and perhaps treating them with much austerity. So deficient is the morality which passes current in the world !

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But I do not call a man truly moral, who only discharges a small, perhaps a *very small* part of his duty. In the idea, with which I couple it with religion, it has a much more extensive signification; and in this sense, I think no man can be religious who is not strictly moral. A man may forbear to cheat, or rob, and yet break up the peace of a family, by his insidious conduct, and do many other wrong things. He may cunningly conduct himself so as to keep within the verge of an outward law, and yet eminently transgress the law of truth and justice; for there are cases which no human law can reach, which are nevertheless very contrary to the great law of conscience.

Extending the influence of conscience would come powerfully in aid of outward law, and turning the attention of the people towards it, instead of directing so much to outward creeds and ceremonies, and giving the name of religion to this superficial appearance of it, would be what only would promote real reformation of manners. I am earnestly desirous to see restored the proper connection between religion and morality, that religion may no longer be considered as an assent to doctrines, and supposed to consist in a round of ceremonies; or morality viewed only as a partial discharge of some of the duties of justice and mercy.

The improper representations thus held out of religion and morality have caused many to stumble. Some have wanted a favourable pretext to throw off all salutary restraint on their passions; they have seen that what was held up as religion was nothing but an exterior shew, and then they frequently either affected to keep up this shew as a cloak for their wrong conduct, and supposed it would be some atonement for it; or else they considered the law of virtue to be a cunningly-devised fable, because they saw clearly that what passed common among many for religion, might with much propriety be classed under this denomination: thus the foundations of true religion and sound morality were sapped, and that too by persons who wished to be thought friends to virtue, and who made a loud outcry in support of their system of it: to many in this class the language is truly applicable, "Through you the name of God is blasphemed," and the interests of pure, undefiled religion greatly injured.

I labour to remove stumbling blocks out of the way, and to clear off the reproach incurred through the conduct of many of
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the high hypocritical professors of religion. These things cause many to reject religion, because they have so connected the idea of it with hypocrisy. Remove the false covering, and many then will see the beauty and simplicity of it; it is now obscured through the artifices of the designing, and the superstition which influences many of those who with honest intentions weakly endeavour to support it—I say weakly, because they injudiciously attempt to identify religion with superstition, and yet they are directly opposite*.

I sincerely wish for the good of mankind, that religion were divested of its tales, sacrifices, and shews, and then it would appear beautiful as it really is. But shews and ceremonies have been substituted in its room. Pomp has been introduced into what is called the worship of God—music, singing, and a long train of splendid shews have been gradually brought forwards, having a direct tendency to divert the attention from reflection and meditation, and to fix it upon these outward objects. Sects differ from one another in the forms they adopt, and dispute with each other about their respective modes. Some societies have kept themselves more free from these things than others, but still all retain too much of the spirit in which these things were introduced. I know the people called Quakers pique themselves on being quite free from these things. I admit their form is more simple, but many of them rest in this form, and secretly place as much dependence on it as any other people whatever. After all, form is but form, and if people rest in it, without coming to real practical godliness, one species of it is as dangerous to rest in as another—God looks at the heart, and disregards mere external silence offered as worship equally as he does the language of the lip, if in either case the heart is far from him. Outward forms, however devout they may seem, can only be useful as far as they are the means of leading the aspirations of the soul to God, that man through obedience may learn to please him by the punctual discharge of his various duties; and they become hurtful, when, as

- * “ Religion is simple, pure, and plain,
- “ Tales made it mystery, offerings made it gain;
- “ Sacrifice and shews were then prepar’d,
- “ The priests eat roast-meat, and the people star’d,”

I have somewhere met with the foregoing lines of some old poet, and thinking them applicable to the subject I am treating of, I set them down.

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they often do, they lead the mind to place reliance on them, and a rest is taken up in the means without pressing forward to the end proposed by these means.

I think it will be found to be a well established truth, that there can be no religion without morality. Most of the variously fabricated systems taught for religion, lean more to insisting on belief as a substitute for sound practice; and now we often hear it said, that if this their belief is shaken, the people will lose all sense of obligation of their duties. Surely this is a miserable proof of the insufficiency of these systems—they leave the mind in so enervated a state, as not to be able to bear the powerful remedies necessary to restore to soundness of principle. They are so weakened by the injurious effects of superstition, that when their eyes are opened to see the inconsistencies of what has been taught for truth, they are in danger of running into extravagancies on the opposite extreme. Some injury will undoubtedly arise on this side, but yet I am fully persuaded that it is for the general good that errors should be pointed out. It concerns every individual in such times as these, to be careful that he thinks soberly; but let not truth be suppressed through a slavish fear of giving offence. If any turn it to their own injury, the blame rests with themselves—the damage which it is feared may arise, proceeds in great measure from the imbecility brought on by the old system, and is a powerful argument against continuing in this way, which has already brought its advocates or followers into such a state, that now they cannot bear sound doctrine, but are in danger of throwing off all restraint when their former system is shaken. Their faith cannot bear the blast—it is not of that kind which endures the trial.

These shadows may and will flee away; but what is really and substantially truth will remain, and ultimately prevail. I have hopes of better times succeeding. The widely extended commerce may fail, which, when carried to the extreme now prevailing, degrades man to a mere machine. Many people are so engrossed by their attention to worldly concerns, as not to take time to think, or form a comprehensive view of sound morality, to serve as a basis for the regulation of their conduct. Great attention to such engagements produces a selfishness which is unfavourable to the growth of virtue and of genuine religion. If the people are deaf to every other instruction, adversity may in kindness be sent to their aid; for in this school many profitable lessons may be learned

learned which might probably be rejected in the haughtiness of prosperity. Most have idolized commerce, and the arts of making gain—a time may come when their idols may be removed.

ON SUPERSTITION.

I HAVE already incidentally spoken of superstition. I consider it as an abortive attempt to comprehend the nature of God, and that it is to the full as injurious to the cause of religion, as infidelity. Many affix the nickname of infidelity to every opinion which does not exactly square with theirs, and hold it up as a bug-bear to deter people from enquiring closely into commonly received opinions. I do not speak of what has thus through prejudice received the name of infidelity; but I speak of a disposition inclinable to disbelieve what it is absolutely necessary we should believe; and which disposition often arises from beholding in a strong light the errors of superstition.

I think we are bound as rational creatures to believe in the necessity of living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, that thereby we may promote our happiness, and procure acceptance with a God of infinite purity: and I lament that an impressive belief of this kind is much wanting, and this defect I call real infidelity or unfaithfulness. Besides the open avowal of this kind of infidelity by some, there are very many who express their belief in words, yet who, notwithstanding their profession, are infidels in practice. Who can calculate the mischief done by this species of infidelity? And yet the champions of orthodoxy shew but little zeal in attacking it; they content themselves like indolent or treacherous friends, in crying out against infidelity of opinion, but often from a consciousness of guilt in themselves, spare infidelity in practice.

Let none think that I class all who think differently from me in an indiscriminate censure; far be it from me in this and other similar passages where I make close remarks, to include all in a general mass. I know there is great difference in individual characters; and where there is an honest sincerity manifested. I can bear much diversity of sentiment, without thinking the worse of those who differ from me: but for the sake of what I conceive to

be the cause of truth, I believe it right for me to point my censure against hypocrisy, let it appear in whom it may.

I believe superstition finds a place in many honest minds. It often appears to be interwoven with some of the best feelings of the human mind; and many are unwilling to be at the trouble, or fearful of the risk of attempting to separate them. I think we may compare superstition to the ivy. It clings round trees, gives them a kind of venerable appearance; but is hurtful to their growth: so superstition enfeebles the mind, and prevents its expansion. People first awakened to serious impressions, look around for something to cover them. They often receive the notions generally prevalent among those, who are counted religious in the particular vicinity, or of the sect they belong to. They connect those accidental circumstances, with the impressions of good, made on their minds; and few are willing afterwards to separate them; and thus I think we may account for the mixture of superstition with some of our best feelings.

I have travelled pretty much for some years, and I have frequently observed, that what was received as religious opinion, was much influenced by local circumstances. In many places there was a predominant sect, and their opinions bore a kind of general sway in such places, and served as a standard to draw the people to. Some sects prevailed in one place, and a sect with very opposite sentiments became predominant in another*. Yet still the general current among the more serious part of the people, was to some one prevailing party, and the many seemed rather to follow the stream, than carefully to examine the way for themselves. The reception of certain doctrines was determined by accidental circumstances, arising from situation, instead of being the result of careful examination. From various causes, and especially from the facility with which people repose on it, superstition is too generally prevalent in every system: and in this view we need no longer wonder at its finding so ready a reception.

It to be sure requires great care in removing the covering, that we do not injure the tree. So, although I earnestly wish to see

* I am not speaking in this place, of any establishment of a sect, by a law, to the rank of precedence. This, however, has an influence in some places, and on some minds; but I allude to the popular reception of peculiar doctrines, in different places, as in some places of Calvinism, in other places of Methodism, &c.

the removal of superstition, I desire to behold it done with a cautious hand ; lest, from the misapplication of substantial truths, any should run themselves into confusion ; and thus injure themselves, and retard the progress of the cause, they wish to promote : for it is a just observation, that some of the most important truths lie within a hair's breadth of most dangerous errors. Such is the narrow path for reformers to move in, if they wish to be really useful to mankind !

Infidelity on one hand, and superstition on the other, are dangerous rocks, upon which the christian may be wrecked, in his passage through life, if he is not cautiously on his guard against dangers on either hand. Superstition is generally rather an error of the judgment, while the heart retains a considerable share of sincerity ; and in this situation, there is a great aptness to receive without examination : thus customs are handed down from one generation to another, without undergoing any enquiry. Many do not look at the rational motives which might have occasioned a practice to have been at first established. They only look whether it be an ancient practice, and then adopt it, as if a practice, because it is of some antiquity, must be right.

I think each generation, and every individual, are bound to search out truth for themselves—and I know of no superior advantages, which former ages had, to find out truth, which we may not acquire in the present day through a diligent search conducted with seriousness, and due caution. But taking up matters on the score of tradition, accommodates the natural indolence of man, and leaves him at liberty to pursue his dreams of profit and of pleasure, free from the interruption of thinking for himself. Many fall into this snare, and may be said quietly to sleep away their time, and almost to forfeit the privilege of rational beings.

There are many practices recorded in scripture, which I think would not now be used if they had not been mentioned in that book ; and yet I think every practice should stand on its own foundation : for ancient practice, however used by some men good in the main, but who yet did not see every thing rightly, cannot consecrate error. Some may be shocked at the assertion, yet I believe it is necessary to tell bold truths, and I hesitate not to say, that I believe a large mass of errors interwoven into the various systems of what is called christianity, has had its origin in receiving the scriptures as unmixed truth, instead of letting each

part and portion of them, stand on its own merit, without insisting on receiving the whole in bulk. I think the apostles were truly valuable characters in most respects, yet that they were not entirely free from superstition.

Succeeding generations instead of doing away this superstition, have gradually added to the heap: so that now by accumulation it has increased to a prodigious size. It has become a matter of great reproach to attempt to point it out, or to remove this rubbish accumulated through many generations, under which truth lies buried, and yet it is necessary that it should be done. Reformers in every age have been stigmatized with the name of heretics; and the reproach is still continued, but I hope some will from time to time be raised up, who will dare to speak out with firmness, and expose the abuses and corruptions of christianity, wherever they may appear. I have often lamented, that in many attempts to revive an attention to religion, those concerned have mistaken the means—they sought to instruct through the medium of superstition. Under this class I place the Methodists, Evangelical societies, &c.

I by no means call in question the sincerity of the motives of many, who embarked in these attempts; here appears to lie their error—they saw the prevailing degeneracy, but they did not apply the right remedy. They directed to forms and ceremonies, and although they sometimes pointed to real reformation, many among them contented themselves with placing dependence on the peculiarity of their forms and manner of expressions; and if for a while they and their converts felt the fervor of what they called devotion, it quickly withered away with many, and they returned again to their former courses, while some retained the appearance of sanctity, when they had lost the virtue; and by such means hypocrisy became too prevalent.

If these remarks should fall into the hands of members of those societies, let them not throw them aside, or suppose from the irritation of their minds, that they are produced by a censorious desire of finding fault. I am influenced by motives very different. I wish to give the word of exhortation, that they may impartially consider, if there is not a cause for these remarks. I believe these societies would have been more useful, if practical holiness had been more attended to, instead of their converts being instructed to lay so much stress on mere external acts, as their long prayers, their much singing, their raptures, fancied feelings, &c. By such means

means they nourished superstition, which, under this kind of culture, encreased much. As a proof of their tendency to superstition, I may refer to many passages in John Wesley's Journals, and to their publications under the titles of Magazines.

Superstition is very hurtful in every respect to the human mind ; while it retains its influence, it injures by substituting form for substance, and when its power is weakened, through time and other causes, it leaves the minds of its former possessors in so enfeebled a state, that from believing too much, they are ready to fall into the opposite extreme of implicit rejection, and in this respect, superstition powerfully promotes the cause of infidelity. It is because I am sincerely attached to the cause of true religion, that I am desirous to remove the insidious enemy, superstition, which under the mask of an ally is secretly sapping the foundation of it. There will be found to be a close connection between what some consider as extremes, superstition, or believing unessentials to be essentials, and infidelity, which rejects those truths, which are really essential.

I have submitted my thoughts with freedom. The reader, I think, may readily perceive that I have studied no method, or systematic arrangement. I have set down my thoughts as they occurred, and generally followed the free current of my thoughts, without premeditation. Such as they are I submit them to the reader, and have no disposition to bias his judgment. I write with an honest intention, and I trust with a due attention to the frailties of human nature. I should be sorry to lead any astray. I may have drawn erroneous conclusions in some cases, and perhaps further experience may enable me to see some things in another point of view ; yet I believe many things which I have advanced, although they are very contrary to the received opinions of men, will be found to be consistent with truth.

If after all I have said, I am asked, whether I profess to be a christian?—I answer, when the word is properly explained, I do. I regard the character of Jesus Christ as a pattern to endeavour to follow after ; but I assuredly believe many things have been taught in his name, which his genuine doctrines never authorised. I also believe the apostles did not possess infallibility in their words and writings, and I altogether object to the ideas usually attached to what is termed the christian religion ; for I do not consider that it is a belief in certain creeds or doctrines supposed to be drawn

from

from scripture, but consists in a practical attention to our various relative duties.

Christianity, or the religion of Jesus Christ, properly understood, is not a belief of mysteries, or the adoption of certain dogmas which have passed currently from hand to hand, and from one generation to another; but is a system of beautiful order, wherein our various duties are connected together, and forms the strongest obligation or tie on its professors, to walk circumspectly, and in strict obedience to its heavenly dictates. I therefore wish to turn the attention of the people from their erroneous notions and speculations, to behold the necessity of practical religion, and by this means only is there a likelihood of true reformation being produced. Until this disposition prevails, things will only go on from bad to worse, and profligacy of manners still further increase. In my feeble endeavours to promote the cause of true reformation, I willingly submit to the reproach thrown on me, and patiently wait for a period when the knowledge of truth will be more generally prevalent in the earth; and when this period more fully arrives, I rest in the full confidence that sentiments of this kind, which I have expressed in this and my former publications, will not then appear so strange.

I may further say that my sentiments, such as they are, have not been gathered from the opinions of others, nor gleaned from books. I am apprehensive that striving to draw instruction too much from this source has been hurtful to many. It has had a tendency to bring into conformity on insecure ground, to injure the energy of individual character, and to make many mere copyists one of another. Little instruction can be gained from books which are too often only the records of human errors; and writers frequently in trying to get rid of some errors, have adopted others. If we have not the original sentiment in our minds, the writings of others will increase but very little our stock of real knowledge. What is gathered from books or other external means may be sometimes found useful in reflecting back again perhaps with additional illustration, our own previous ideas; but if the origin is not found in ourselves, our knowledge will only be of that superficial kind, which is gathered from the thoughts of other men.

Man is often engaged in roaming abroad, and thus he falls into unprofitable speculations, and very frequently heaps up a
pile

pile of errors, partly his own, and part he gathers from others, while his suitable employment, and his main business lies at home within the confines of his own bosom.

In the present situation of things, man seems involved in a labyrinth, or thicket of errors, and he who thinks to get out of it by the help of books or by the advice of other men, is in danger of getting into one bye-path as soon as he finds his way out of another; and thus he may still continue to wander through this perplexing wilderness: in such circumstances sound first principles and virtuous conduct may serve him as guides to lead him out of it, otherwise he may continue to grope his way, and be perpetually changing system, without getting rid of error. Man has been too much in the habit of converting trivialities of form into essentials, whereas in my apprehension the path of duty is more simple. Our duty consists more in right acting than in the most nicely arranged system of opinions: I therefore, above all things, wish earnestly to recommend to sound practice. I am willing to admit, that to a certain extent, right thinking is conducive to right acting; but the soundest belief will not atone for unsound practice.

I am fully sensible of the manifold moral infirmities of man—he has strong passions and wayward propensities to contend with—his state requires much inward attention to the cultivation of his mind, and the regulation of these passions and dispositions, which, although they are useful to us, when kept in their proper place of subordination, yet require strict government to prevent them from leading us far astray. To act well in our several relations, is the essential point; and whoever sufficiently attends to the internal conflicts he meets with, in endeavouring to do right, will have often cause to see himself in so humbling a point of view, that from a knowledge of his weaknesses, he will be brought into that state of mind, in which all boasting is excluded; and although he dare not indulge in the dream of the righteousness of Christ being imputed to him, yet he will acknowledge that it is through the especial grace of God, freely offered to the acceptance of all, that he has been enabled to do some things which are right, while at the same time he has nothing to boast of, but finds in many cases he has been an unprofitable servant.

I have not sought to gain popularity by my addresses to the public. In my Reasons for withdrawing from Society with the People called Quakers, if I had confined myself to pointing

out their errors of conduct, I suppose my observations might have passed off pretty smoothly; but I believed it to be a duty also to point out other errors, and to attack deeply rooted prejudices. I expected this would occasion a great clamour. I was not disappointed in this expectation, nor do I regret in the least degree my having exposed myself in this manner. In a good cause there is surely sufficient encouragement to make us willing to suffer reproach. The testimony of a good conscience is infinitely preferable to the applause or favour of men.

I have not the smallest desire to draw over a party, or to proselyte to opinions. I know the unprofitableness of setting afloat an airy speculation, which might lead away from a close attention to sound practice. Opinions, either for or against any particular doctrine are of no avail, further than they are influential on the conduct, and numbers being on any side is no test of truth.

I most earnestly desire my reader may examine with the greatest caution, whatever is offered to his consideration. I have carefully avoided, both in private and in public, an attempt to influence the judgment of any; because I am thoroughly sensible of the inutility of a procedure of this kind. There has been in several instances among some a remarkable coincidence of sentiments on particular subjects; but this has not been the effect of any preconcerted plan, nor are some at all solicitous to look for the support of numbers on their side—for if any should hastily receive opinions, from motives of undue attachment to the sentiments of others, arising from partial affection to such, or from a favourable opinion they might entertain of their integrity, or soundness of judgment, it would be building on a very insecure foundation, which would not stand a day of trial.

In passing along through life, every person meets with many occurrences to try his stability; and opinions taken up from others, will not stand this trial. They who receive on light and insufficient grounds, are likely to exhibit a wavering, unsteady conduct; and perhaps reject again on as light grounds, as they before adopted. I do not set up for a sect-maker. I cannot join with any associated body or society; and yet I think I may safely venture to assert that this does not proceed from a sanctionious disposition, as if I prided myself on being more righteous than my neighbours—my heart bears me witness that I am not actuated by this motive. But I believe societies, according to the prin-

principles on which they are now universally conducted, obstruct the progress of free enquiry, and consequently the establishment of truth on firm grounds. I likewise believe mankind is not at present so generally enlightened, as to form an association on sound principles; or to act in concert as general bodies, with advantage to themselves, or to the cause of righteousness. For these reasons, although loving my fellow men with the tenderest affection, and most ardently desirous of their real improvement, I believe myself constrained to stand in some measure aloof, at least so far as that I cannot join with any community. I can cordially unite with divers up and down in their individual capacity; and wish to cherish sentiments of good will and courtesy to all, even when their sentiments and mine materially differ. I can acknowledge individual man as my brother; but I cannot join in the associations formed for what many deem religious purposes.

I earnestly entreat that none may so far misconceive my meaning as to suppose that these sentiments have their rise in pride, or the arrogancy of self-conceit. I state my sentiments with freedom, and in doing so, I expect I often expose myself to the hazard of being much misunderstood.

As I write without studied method, and have no plan previously fixed respecting my manner of treating my subjects, I was looking to conclude this present address in this place; but before I lay aside my pen for the present, I am more inclined to make some additional observations.

ON THE
GENERAL STATE OF MANNERS,

AND THEIR TENDENCY TOWARDS PRODUCING PERNICIOUS
ERRORS.

I HAVE in several of the foregoing pages endeavoured to depict the evils of superstition. I am not insensible of the evils of libertinism, to which I fear there is a strong current, as well among those who stick up for the exterior shew of seeming decency

cency as among others; and if I have said more against the many evils arising from formality and superstition, it is not because I am insensible of the dangers of libertinism, but my line of life leading me more to an acquaintance with many among whom the former evils abounded, I have from thence been led to state them in a strong manner. I believe this was needful. Many cry out against licentiousness of manners, while the mighty evils of the opposite kind have not been I think sufficiently exposed.

I fear there is much practical infidelity, in which many zealous champions of orthodoxy as well as the opposers of it agree. The influence of custom is very great, and many at first for want of due caution, almost imperceptibly fall into wrong things, which frequently afterwards become confirmed into inveterate habits. The tables of many become a snare to them—they often act as if they *lived to eat*, instead of following the rational rule, of *eating to live*, and indulge themselves in the use of too much wine and other strong drink; sitting for a considerable space of time after their meals over their bottles*. This is a most pernicious custom, and productive of many evil consequences—a moderate portion of strong drink is sufficient for all the salutary purposes which nature requires. I lament over the proneness of the poor to spend their little pittance in debasing themselves by intoxication. How often do the rich over their cups severely blame them for doing so? while they are at the same time guilty of as pernicious excess themselves. Such see the mote in their brother's eye; but attend not to have the greater defect removed from themselves. They shew an evil example, while they are often harshly censuring others.

* It may be thought by some a trifling observation; but I cannot well avoid remarking in this place, that I consider the custom in most companies of the females retiring from table, and leaving the men indulging over their bottles, as a proof (excuse me for using strong terms) of the tendency to barbarism and profligacy in the general state of manners; and though in some cases it may only be the effect of custom, it still argues something very defective in the social system. As things are now circumstanced, it is a privilege to them not to be witnesses of the noise and rattle, and in some cases still more disgraceful conduct which takes place in such scenes; but if greater chastity of manners prevailed, as ought to be the case, there would be no necessity for their withdrawing. I mention this as one proof among many, of the relaxed state of general morals.

It is a melancholy, but I fear a certain truth, that among all classes, both of rich and poor, much departure from sound morality prevails; and the only remedy I know at all likely to be effectual to promote true reformation, is for every individual to use the greatest exertion to reform himself, to see his own errors, and try to amend them. Then the rich would not suffer all their virtuous sentiment to evaporate in expressions against the vices of the poor, neither would the poor envy the rich, but all, let them be of what rank they may, would be united in a general concern to promote the individual, and the general good. I look for a reformation only through a more pure and strict morality; but if men continue dissipated in their private lives, whether they assume the mark of attention to outward appearances, or openly shew themselves as they are, still depravity of manners will prevail, and luxury with all its train of pernicious evils will advance with rapid strides. In the present state of morals, I do not wonder at so many being unwilling to enquire after truth; indeed they are incapacitated for the search after it. Luxury enervates the mind, and it is in vain to look for the serious and bold enquirer after truth among the votaries of pleasure. The intoxicating effects of pleasure, produce an almost universal selfishness. The whole bent and energy of the mind is unworthily turned to procure wealth, each in his haste to acquire it eagerly treading on the heels of his neighbour, and not unfrequently rejoicing in his downfall; the wealth thus obtained, is often spent in the luxurious excesses so generally prevalent, in which the rich and middling classes foolishly vie with each other, to outdo one another in folly: yet this conduct passes current in the world, and is not only generally unreprieved, but is commonly applauded, and the successful in these pursuits envied by their less successful imitators. Thus there appears a general race in the paths of error, so that the description given by the prophet Malachi* of the Jewish nations,

* I highly venerate many passages in the scriptures, although I cannot receive the whole in bulk. I therefore think I have a right to quote them, as I would do any other book. In many instances they are very instructive, and shew the boldness and firmness, with which the prophets pointed out the vices prevalent in their times—an example worthy of imitation to christians to do similarly, using, at the same time, the necessary caution to point out errors in a suitable temper and frame of mind; not as harsh censors to exalt themselves, but under a due sense of their own frailties, to bear a firm testimony against the prevailing errors of the times, whether proceeding from hypocrisy or licentiousness.

appears to me to be justly expressive of the situation of things in these countries, " They call the proud happy, and they that work wickedness are set up."

I think this brief sketch will not be found to be an overcharged picture of modern manners. To what cause are we to attribute this state of things? The first cause to be sure lies in the breast of man—his not keeping his passions under due restraint. This is the cause of all the evil in the world. But we shall also find that evil example arising from the prevalence of wrong habit and mistaken notions respecting religion; as if religion were an assent to opinions, or a system of mere belief, come in for their share of promoting error, and are powerful auxiliaries in its cause. It appears to me that too many suffer themselves to be carried away by the stream of fashion, or custom, without considering whether many practices, which they indolently adopt through the influence of example, are not really wrong. There is a necessity for a close scrutiny into all our actions, and the motives which influence us to action; and for a want of a watchful care in this respect, we find many errors committed by persons with good intentions, but who are not sufficiently careful to resist the influence of custom. Such slip unawares into injurious habits, and many from at first giving way to the fashionable *follies*, end in becoming slaves to the *vices* of the times.

I may be thought by some to have formed too austere notions respecting a sound morality; but I believe it will appear, that the foundations of this essential principle have been sapped; and great alterations must take place before the present corrupt state of things will be mended. There may be attempts at partial reformation, but as to any extensively useful purpose, I believe they will prove abortive, until the necessity is seen for adopting a morality much more strict, and on purer principles, than what now passes current in the world; for superstition will always have a very strong hold on minds enfeebled by defective morals. It is because I feel myself so interested in the general good, that I express myself with so much earnestness and plain dealing on these subjects; and call upon all, who are sensible that things are not as they ought to be, to look for the remedy, in promoting more strict and correct ideas of morality; for, by so doing, a more essential advance would be made than by any system of reform, unconnected with the great and leading idea of a substantial reformation of manners, as without it there would only be change
of

of form, and the corruption would still remain under a different modification.

Commerce, as carried on to its present overgrown extent, and the institutions which are connected with it, are unfavourable to sound principles of morality. I am not an advocate for idleness; for I believe it also is especially injurious to the best interests of man: but I believe that in a well-regulated order of things, there would be less extensive trading, and also a less expensive manner of living. We should learn to contract our wants, which would increase substantial happiness. As things now are, there are many burdens, which press heavily on the people for the support of wars and expensive establishments, which in the view of sober reason are found not to be necessary. This, however, does not seem to be the proper place to enlarge on these subjects, because my present design is not so much to point out the errors of states as to turn the attention to the necessity of individual reformation.

I cannot give up the sentiment, that in succeeding times more enlightened ideas will prevail, with regard to our duties, and that then the errors of overtrading, as well as numerous other hosts of errors now subsisting, will be clearly seen. In the mean time, what remains for us as individuals is that each do his own part by a strict attention to his duties, and as he sees an opportunity by contributing his mite towards general reformation.

Upon a review of the whole, it appears clearly manifest to me, that the present state of manners is in many instances opposite to the dictates of a sound morality; and that our social institutions contain much practical error. A commerce too widely extended, produces an unwarrantable selfishness, and absorbs an undue proportion of the attention of most. Luxury, by producing artificial wants, and leading into many unnecessary expences, appears to countenance, and in some respect to render necessary, this system of overgrown trading: thus error supports error; and there appears no way to get rid of it, but by adopting a line of conduct, almost entirely different from that which is now pursued; and to act according to the pure and enlightened maxims of morality and religion, when these terms are rightly understood, and freed from all injurious mixture. The reproach of singularity will doubtless attend those, who dare to move in this line; but then such will be supported by a consciousness of having endeavoured to do their duty, and to act their parts well in their present allotments.

I belong

I belong to no sect ; nor do I want to form a new one. I feel calm peace in my separation from all outward societies. The sentiments I express are my own. Let the reader impartially judge of them for himself. While I feel a peaceable serenity respecting the past, I cannot but be earnestly solicitous respecting my future steppings, well knowing the infirmities incident to man, and sensible of my own weakness. I feel awful humility to attend my mind, in thus once more exposing my sentiments to public view. My earnest wish for myself is, that I may always keep in this disposition ; and my desire is equally sincere for my neighbours, that they may grow in grace, and in the saving knowledge of God ; and with a seriousness becoming a subject of such infinite importance, throw off the shackles of bigotry and superstition, and submit only to the guidance of Truth.

J. H.

Lisburn : 13th of 5th month, 1802.

END.

THOUGHTS ON THE ABUSE

OF

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE,

AS

APPLIED TO RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS;

WITH

Some Observations addressed to

THE PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS.

BY JOHN HANCOCK.

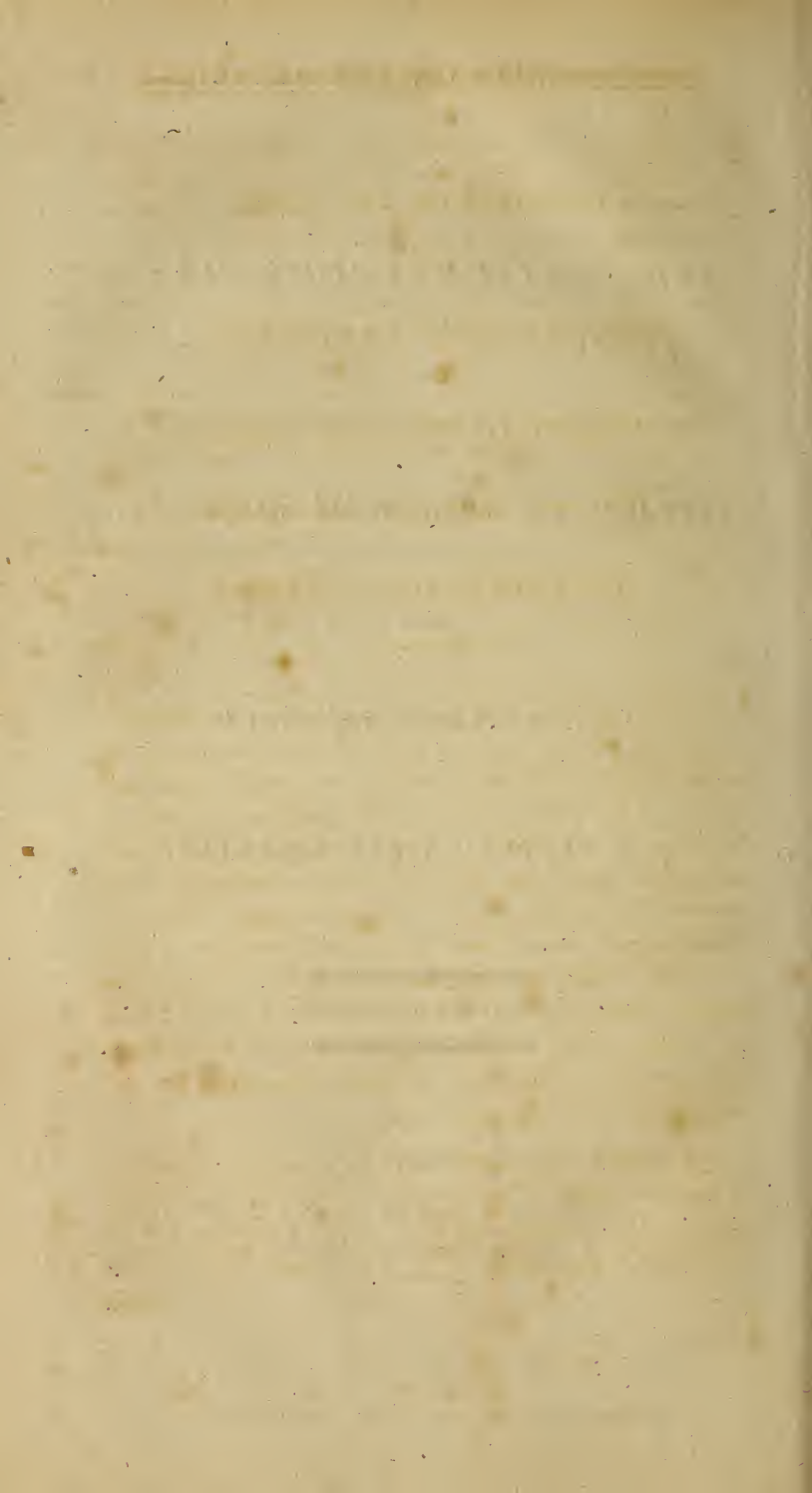
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1803.



THOUGHTS ON THE ABUSE
OF
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE,
AS APPLIED TO RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS;
With some observations addressed to
THE PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS.

I AM fully sensible, that, in the present day, much reproach attaches to speaking what we are persuaded is the truth, if it happen to thwart commonly received, and deeply rooted prejudices. I know many have not been backward to throw a full share of this reproach on me, on account of my former publications: yet I am not deterred from expressing what appears to me to be truth. If my sentiments on sundry important subjects do not meet with present reception, a time may come, when truth may be more carefully, and with less prejudice, sought after. Whether this time may soon arrive, or whether the day be yet far distant, and that I may never live to see this happy season, it is both unnecessary and impossible for me to ascertain.

The present time is only mine, and therefore I am willing to use time, while it is afforded to me, to make some additional observations on subjects, of which I conceive it is of importance to have clearer views. Possibly my hints may here-
after

after tend to stir up a more close examination into these matters, even although at present they should be but little attended to. I have not a rage for proselytism. It has often produced much fierce zeal, and ungodly contention. When those who were actuated by it, were even aiming to do right, they have, by enlisting the violent passions in its service, often introduced a train of evil consequences, and by this mean only substituted one system of errors under the assumed name of reformation, in the place of more ancient errors—neither do I seek the honour that comes from men, and consequently I am less moved by the obloquy attendant on a public avowal of my sentiments. For it has happened to all, in every successive age, who have made attempts for reform, that they have met with reproach, and have had their views misunderstood—but the strife of tongues may be overcome by patient endurance, and christian fortitude; and, in the end, wisdom has been justified of her meek, but resolutely determined followers.

The subject on which I now address the public, has long engaged my attention. I think it is of great importance; for, in my apprehension, many injurious mistakes have arisen from the misapplication of figurative language. It has led to the adoption of a train of ideas, either without a precise meaning, or with mistaken ones; and when error once gets possession of the human mind, and has crept in with our best feelings, it possesses a seeming sanctity, that prevents many from attempting to remove it. To this cause, I attribute the timidity manifested by many well meaning people to examine the foundation of their belief. They, with a good share of sincerity of intention, let in a culpable timidity, and are afraid to examine; and if a thought arises, that looks like a doubt, they hasten to exclude it. This timidity stops all further enquiry in their minds; and the next step is not unfrequently to censure others, who think it right for them to examine more narrowly into the foundation of what they have received for truth.

truth. Hence we often find many who now strenuously oppose all enquiry, lest it may lead to innovation, acknowledging that they once had similar sentiments floating through their minds.

I am ready to conclude, that if the motives for rejecting such sentiments were closely examined into, a kind of indolence of mind, and a fear to walk in a path of singularity generally spoken against, would often be found to lie concealed among the secret causes which determined them to reject such sentiments. The fear of man, and the sectarian prejudices of belonging to a people, whom they have been long taught to consider as the chosen and peculiar people, may often come in for a share in the determination—while the real motives for action often lie disguised for want of a close and frequent examination, and many attempts are made to dignify them by names, which a close inspection will not warrant. An indolence, that never examines, but takes every thing upon trust, may be called prudent caution, and some may wrap themselves up in a cloak of self-sufficiency, remaining at ease in their possessions, while they indulge themselves in the confidence, that all must be well with them, because they keep in what they call *the good old way*, and are supported by all the strength, that can be received by having numbers on their side.

This to be sure is a path of ease, when it is compared with the opposite path, in which every thing is to be closely examined, and in which, for the sake of possessing substantial peace, some have believed it to be their duty to walk, and thus to separate from many of their former companions, and to pass along in a state of comparative solitude. I have endeavoured to trace out some causes, which have obstructed the progress of reform in some minds; but there are many other causes, which operate in different minds to retard this work. Deeply rooted prejudices are not easily removed; and many

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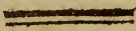
of the passions stand strongly opposed to their eradication. I have shewn that timidity operates in many instances: in others, conscience makes cowards of many. The worldling, the lukewarm, and the libertine, fly for shelter to a profession; and wish to atone for deficiencies of conduct by implicit belief. To such, serious inquiry into the discoveries of what is truth, is not adapted. It does not answer their purpose. They want a soft cushion to repose themselves on; and this they find in the various systems of belief, which are ready settled for them. To these they trust, and go on securely in their plans of gain, and of pleasure, and it seems altogether impossible to awaken such from their dreams.

Prudent caution, remote from rashness, is necessary to be attended to, in the cause of reform. It is essential to its progress; for some timid minds may be frightened from the path of reform, by the injudicious rashness of some of its advocates. Yet it is not a sufficient cause to reject reform, because some have attempted it with a rash zeal. Like every other thing, it may be abused; but this should be no reason against a steady, prudent perseverance in it. I apprehend many have been deterred from the path of reform, by the dread of going too far, and have thus sheltered under plausible reasonings, and kept themselves from the discharge of the duty of free and serious enquiry.

These remarks may appear a digression from the subject I principally design to treat of, but I think they may not be an unsuitable introduction to it.

I now proceed to attempt to point out the injurious consequences, that have arisen from the too free use of figurative language, and the many erroneous opinions, which have followed from it; I have farther to premise this general remark, that I hope to speak with becoming diffidence, and to bear in mind the frailty of human nature. I have no desire to impose my opinions on others, or that any should adopt them without careful examination. E-

ry one has a right to propose his sentiments with becoming modesty, and yet with a steady firmness; I claim this liberty for myself, and leave my sentiments to make way in the minds of my readers, as each may find them deserving of attention.



ON THE ABSURDITY OF ERRONEOUS IDEAS,
 ARISING FROM THE ABUSE OF
 FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE, RESPECTING GOD.



There is a God!—all nature proclaims it, and man cannot but bear testimony to it, when he attentively considers the operations of his own mind—because God speaks in the hearts of all by his grace and good spirit, illuminating the understanding, and raising up the testimony of a pure conscience; so that indeed God is near to every one of us, and by the convictions of his spirit shews us the difference between good and evil. Thus, whether man looks outward to every thing around him, or turns his attention in upon himself, he may find abundant proof of the existence of a God—so far is clear, beyond all manner of doubt; but man has bewildered himself in attempting to speculate on the divine nature. I think it more safe to follow the example of an ancient Greek Philosopher, who, on being asked, what was the nature of God, desired some time to consider of it; he again requested longer time, and at length acknowledged, that the longer he studied it, the more it appeared impossible for him to find it out. I think that we ought to be satisfied with a firm belief of the existence of a God, the first cause, and the upholder of all things, without a vain attempt on our part to define what is, after all, beyond our comprehension.

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The Hebrew scriptures, by their highly figurative language, on this subject, have proved a fruitful source of errors. God is in many parts of them represented as acting under the influence of human passions—he is said to be jealous, to hate, to be angry, and to command man to shed his brother's blood. I will admit, that this manner of speaking of him, may in some degree have arisen from the imperfection of language, and man applying finite ideas to a being of infinity and perfection; but though candour may permit to make this concession to a certain point, yet I cannot bring myself to believe, but that many of the scripture writers entertained too low and gross ideas of the nature of God; and from the implicit adoption of their writings in this instance, as well as in others, many mistaken opinions arose. They often represented him under similes drawn from the kingly office; and with this figure they readily connected the ideas of pomp, arbitrary power, and parade, and supposed that he was to be approached with slavish fear, and adulation, and to be appeased with gifts, sacrifices, and costly shews. Hence arose many of the practices considered among the Jews as religious observances, which Christians of every sect, with some variations from the original model, and one from another, have too servilely, and without discrimination, adopted. The Christian borrowed from the Jews, and each of the successive sets of reformers retained a considerable portion of the old ceremonies, and the ancient ideas they had borrowed.

The Jews had sacrifices and shews, and a temple, in which they seemed to suppose that the divine power in some manner resided. They had an order of men under the title of a priesthood, whose business it was to attend to these things, excluding the interference of the people in what they called their holy things. The professing christians have their shews, their sacred houses and their priests; differing a little in name, but the same in effect. They attached ideas of superior sanctity

to the houses appropriated for the public assembling together, and called the offices performed there, the public worship of God; as if God could be worshipped by such acts of exterior form.

I have often seriously revolved, in my mind, this subject of what is called public worship. I think the proper business of publicly assembling together, has been too little understood. I consider it as only relating to the ends of public instruction, and mutual edification; and if associations of this kind were conducted on right principles, man might be useful one to another; and, considering our state of weakness, mutual benefit might be received from thus assembling together; but for the ends of mutual edification, there appears no need of a set of hired teachers like the Jewish priesthood; nor can I think the act of assembling together, merely considered as an outward act, is the worship of God. Jesus Christ informed the woman, with whom he conversed, at Jacob's well, that neither at Jerusalem nor at the mountain of Samaria, was the Father to be worshipped, but that they who worship him aright, must worship him in spirit and in truth. I conceive this to mean the dedication of the heart, not the language of the lip. God requires from us obedience to his laws, not the parade of an outward assembling together under the name of performing acceptable worship to him.

Meeting together in a serious manner for the purpose of mutually receiving and communicating instruction, may be helpful to man, but ought not in my estimation to be considered as an act of worship towards God. What has passed current in the world as the worship of God?—It bears the appearance of attempting to recommend ourselves to the acceptance of God, by such acts as it may be supposed would conciliate the favour of an earthly prince; and this is one of the effects arising from a too free use of

figurative language, and adapting our conduct to the mistaken ideas, that originate from this source. The princes of this world like pomp, and shew, and to be approached with servility. The idea of king has been interwoven with our notions respecting the nature of God—and hence arises the pomp of what is called his worship.

I have in some of my former writings expressed my thoughts respecting music, that it is a luxurious gratification, in a general practical view injurious to the human mind: but of all species of it, I consider that part which is applied to what is called the worship of God, the most objectionable. The attempt to offer it as worship in hymns, and psalms, either vocally or by the instrumentality of an organ, in my apprehension, carries very much the appearance of absurdity; as if God could be pleased by such means—I express myself in strong terms, but I hope not uncharitably—I wish to speak of things plainly, as I conceive they really are; but far be the thought from my heart, to suppose but that many are in the practice of those things with much innocency and integrity of heart—they have not examined into the grounds of various customs, in which they are entangled, and they follow on in the accustomed track.

I would offer this farther apology for the plainness of speech, which I use on this occasion, that it appears to me right to point out the error, or supposed error, of any practice in strong terms to induce to an examination of it, and yet at the same time I think it my duty to make reasonable and tender allowance for those who may be in the practice of those things, which we condemn. It may be right boldly to point out the offence, and yet to exercise all charity towards those, who may be in the practice of those things which we condemn.

We may now consider this practice of introducing music and singing in another point of view, as it relates to the proper purpose

pose of assembling together for the sake of instruction; and here I think it has an injurious tendency; it may raise the animal spirits, and this we may call the fervor of devotion—it has a tendency to amuse, but I think it is detrimental to purposes of real improvement. It may to a very considerable degree nourish enthusiasm and superstition; but I think it does not tend to promote serious reflection and a profitable communing with ourselves.—I know that many have supposed they have received benefit in such practices. The sincerity of the heart is owned in every state; but it is an error to conclude that every act in which we are engaged, even with pure intentions, is consequently an act right in itself.—It is necessary in all things to go below the surface, as otherwise we shall be likely only to form a superficial judgment.

While the practice of singing psalms or hymns in public assemblies is the subject of consideration, it may not be useless to trace the origin of this practice. David practised it; but I do not see the advantage of blending christianity with the customs of the Jews. David danced also before the ark*—the imitation of this practice has been wisely omitted by most sects in latter times; yet a few enthusiasts plead scripture as their authority for their extravagant dancing or jumping; as the Shakers in America, and the Jumpers, a class of Methodists in Wales; so easy is it to find precedent in ancient times for the greatest extravagancies. Figurative language has contributed its share to encourage this practice.—The highly figurative and mystical language of the book of revelations countenances the practice. It is proper to observe that many in different ages have doubted the authenticity of this book, and supposed that John was not the author of it.—Let this be as it may, I think the interest of true religion does not suffer by doubts being entertained of the authenticity of this part of scripture. Its style is incomprehensible,

* David, by the abuse of a strong figure, is said to have been a man after God's own heart. I think many instances in his life, and to mention only one, his dying charge to Solomon to be revenged on Shemei, make strongly against the validity of this assertion.

comprehensible, and the attempt to explain its strong figures, or allegories, and to accommodate them to the passing events of successive generations has mostly ended in fostering the growth of fanaticism and extravagance.

In the manner in which this book treats of the nature of God, and from the appearance of pomp and splendour which it assigns to him, great encouragement is given to forming gross and unworthy ideas of him who is incomprehensible to the view and conjectures of finite mortals. I think it is better to confess our incapacity of forming adequate ideas of a great first cause, by whom all things are created and upheld, than to attempt to explain our ideas of his nature, by arraying him with the pomp and splendour of an earthly prince sitting upon a throne, and surrounded by a retinue of attendants of different gradations. If this representation be considered as a strong figure, it may not be hurtful, only there is need of caution; and I think it is better to speak in terms less liable to be misunderstood, as there is so much danger of figurative language being abused, and what was meant to be taken figuratively, being construed literally.

But if it be required to take this account as a real representation, my mind revolts at the idea of forming a likeness of God described in characters so derogatory to the sublime ideas, which ought to accompany the contemplation of such a subject. What awful, reverent humility should possess the mind of man, in looking towards him, and if a due sense of this necessary humility accompanied his mind, man would be restrained from forming conjectures on a subject, which lies beyond his scanty means of knowledge.

It may seem to digress, to make in this place a remark on another instance of the abuse of figurative language, which, however, I think, is intimately connected with the preceding subject, and arises from it. I am firmly impressed with a strong conviction of the immortality of the soul. I believe
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it, because I think it is written in legible characters, on the human heart, and because the circumstances of our present state of existence bear testimony to it; but I do not receive the figurative account in which a future state is represented in some parts of scripture.

I regret that mankind, in too general a way, are in such a state, debased by their vices, and enfeebled by superstition, that they seem scarcely capable of examining into these matters with safety to themselves. The ties of religion are so loose on them, that if they slacken in the popular creed, and relax in the feeble obligations derived from this slender sanction, they seem ready in some instances to abandon themselves to the full career of their passions. By this means, the cause of free enquiry has been brought into disrepute. I do not wish to be instrumental in the smallest degree to relax the most strict obligations of morality, another name for genuine religion, which Christ defined to consist in the love of God, and in the love of our neighbour. If we really felt the love of God in our hearts, we would be just, merciful and humble; and discharge all our relative and social duties towards our brethren of mankind of every degree, with the most scrupulous attention; having, for our leading principle, the sense of duty arising from our love to God, and the precepts of his divine law, inwardly discovered in the hearts of all men.

I wish to see the people truly religious; but not that they should be under the influence of superstition, or of notions derogatory to the pure doctrines of unadulterated piety—that they should not have only the exterior trappings, and shew of virtue, but that they should really be possessed of this principle which would invigorate them to follow purity of life and manners.

I expect many misinterpret the tendency of my writings. I endeavour to point out the dangers of trusting in a form, and paying

paying implicit reverence to a book, in which, in my apprehension, truth and error are blended together. But it is far from my intention in doing so, to lessen the obligation to virtuous conduct. While people believe only traditionally, it appears immaterial what it is they believe, and while their speculations respecting religion terminate only in talk, and practice is neglected, their profession of faith is vain. I think I cannot unsettle those who are not on any sure foundation, because they now have nothing to lose, and I do not see that I do any injury in taking from them their insecure fancies. I recommend an earnest attention to strict propriety of conduct, as the first step towards engaging in any enquiry, which will be really profitable in the result. If others speculate rashly to their own loss, on themselves the blame must lie. I think the tendency of my writings is not to encourage unprofitable speculation, but it is necessary in my opinion to attempt to remove some errors out of the way, which have kept many from having a true sight of their state. If I see my neighbour trusting in an unsubstantial form, and depending on opinion, as a substitute for practice, I think I am doing him a kindness, and contributing my endeavours to promote his, as well as the general good, by taking on me, the unwelcome task of freely warning him of his mistake. So that instead of wounding the best interests of religion, as some suppose I am doing, I trust my writings have in reality a different tendency, when they are viewed on a more extensive scale, than that which the narrow bigotry of sects brings forward—at least, such is my intention, and I hope I am not mistaken in the means.

There is another society, who have, I think, with much propriety, discarded the pomp attached to public worship. The people called Quakers did well in their beginning in going so far as they did in this respect; but, like all preceding reformers, they stopped short—and many of their successors failed
greatly

greatly in coming up to the plan on which their forefathers set out. Thus they have dwindled into much formality. The simplicity of their appearance in this, as well as in other respects, has been specious; but I fear when it comes to be closely examined into, there will be something found to be wanting. They laid aside their exterior pomp and trappings, but I fear that in a certain degree they retained the spirit, which produced these things.

The age in which the Quakers first appeared, was an age of gloomy superstition. I think they retained too much of it; and having once adopted it, a disposition to adhere tenaciously to all their ancient establishments, and to oppose all tendency to reformation, has perpetuated their ancient customs, and produced a disinclination impartially to examine into the origin of them. Thus they still retained the idea that worship was paid to God, more especially at the times of publicly assembling together: they called their assemblies, meetings of worship, and seemed to suppose that a peculiar sanctity, and a more holy frame of mind ought to prevail on such occasions.

I have already expressed the idea, that in my opinion, the worship in spirit and in truth consists in the attention of the mind of man to the discoveries of the grace of God manifested there, and in a constant struggle and earnest endeavour, to have our conduct regulated by its dictates: by this means the universal Father may with equal acceptance be worshipped at all times, in the daily transactions of our life, in our various communications with the world, in the discharge of our domestic and social duties, as well as in the hour of silent retirement, or in the midst of the congregation.

Religion, viewed in this manner, is found not to consist in the exterior act, but in an inward attention to the internal principle of truth, and of justice in the heart; and the publicly assembling together is only useful so far as it affords a means
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of our being helpful to one another by mutual instruction. But I think the uses of association for religious purposes have been greatly abused among all societies: they have been too much considered as an end, instead of being viewed as a means leading to that end; for I think they can be no further useful, than as they have a tendency to lead the mind to the practice of piety and virtue, and they are hurtful when they are too much relied upon, and attempts made to substitute them for the proper discharge of our various duties. These remarks equally apply to those associations conducted with pompous activity, as well as to those meetings which may be held in formal silence.

Actuated by these motives, I have for upwards of two years declined the attendance of public assemblies; because I think the purposes of them have been perverted: yet when we consider the weakness and frailty incident to our present state, it seems desirable to have the mutual aid and assistance which I am ready to think associations conducted on sound principles might produce; and I would rejoice in seeing any plan brought forward that would be likely to produce the advantages of public association, without the disadvantages and injurious tendencies which have hitherto attended it.

I have frequently viewed this subject with some solicitude, but I have as yet seen no way of obtaining its advantages, without encountering many disadvantages. Perhaps a time may come, when the old ideas and prejudices attached to this subject may be done away; and then a prospect may open of an association on liberal and enlightened principles, wherein neither the narrow views of bigotted sectarianism, nor the maxims of superstition, will be allowed to have any place.

I have dwelt the longer on this subject, because I have thought it is intimately connected with the purport of this chapter, that we may have proper ideas of the nature of the Great Supreme, and see clearly the disadvantage of forming our
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ideas on the popular notions arising from the abuse of figurative language. I have endeavoured to express myself in language as clearly as I well could. To those who have thought closely and seriously on this subject, or to those who may be willing to do so, I expect my language will be intelligible. The declaration of the holy Jesus is applicable on this occasion.

“The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in the mountain of Samaria, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father; the true worshippers shall worship him in spirit and in truth, for he seeketh such to worship him: God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.”—See John, iv. chap.

ON THE
ALLEGORICAL DOCTRINES
OF THE
FALL OF MAN—AND OF ORIGINAL SIN.

THESE doctrines have, in my apprehension, been a fruitful source of error; the abuse of figurative language has been one cause, though there are also other causes, which I shall presently proceed to point out. The most dangerous consequence resulting from this doctrine, as it is generally explained, is the countenance which it gives to man to shift the blame of his wrong conduct from himself, and to place it to the account of his supposed remote ancestors, Adam and Eve. This idea, I fear, often settles poor man at ease in his wrong conduct, and has a tendency to weaken the struggles in his mind against the influence of his passions, when they happen to take a wrong direction, as they always do when they are not kept in their proper places. The giving way to wrong dispositions, is *the fall* which every man experiences in his own indi-

vidual capacity:—he falls, because he transgresses the divine law discovered in his heart, and is consequently accountable for this want of obedience. He does not fall, because Adam and Eve disobeyed, but because he himself disobeys, and neglects to join in with the operation of grace in his heart. Thus responsibility attaches more closely to him, and the self-complacent doctrine, which often reconciles man to himself by throwing the blame upon others, is removed, with all its train of evil consequences.

I admit the fall of man when this term is properly defined. I think it is a consequence of his own transgression; but I reject the figurative account of it, not merely because I cannot comprehend it, but because I think it is a doctrine which has an injurious practical effect upon many who adopt it. That it has not an injurious effect upon all who embrace it, is not owing to the truth of the doctrine; but we find that in this case, as well as respecting other erroneous doctrines, the sincerity of the heart, and other favourable circumstances frequently operate to the prevention of speculative opinions doing as much injury, or influencing the conduct to so great a degree as we might suppose to take place, from a theoretical examination of the doctrines. This we may see exemplified every day. Man frequently acts better than from his opinions or system we have reason to expect, and from this circumstance we may learn to have becoming charity for one another's speculative errors.

It is desirable to have right sentiments, and to a certain degree it may have a tendency to produce right conduct; but I feel no hesitation in saying, that I prefer right conduct with erroneous sentiment, to the finest set of opinions where there is not an earnest endeavour especially to attend to propriety of conduct. What doctrine can be more dangerous than to suppose that we must of necessity do wrong, because Adam sinned? This is to shift the blame in great measure off ourselves, and
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the evil is further increased by coupling with it the remaining part of the doctrine, that the righteousness of another has removed this load of guilt. If we know our own state we must allow that our knowledge in most things, and also our obedience to what we know to be our duty, are very imperfect. This appears beyond doubt to be the law of our nature in our present stage of existence—why it is so, we cannot tell, for the clearing up of this and many other seeming difficulties, we must wait until they shall be explained to us in another state of being, to which, as heirs of immortality, we look forward as our inheritance.

“ ’Tis immortality—’tis that alone,
 “ Amidst life’s pains, debasements, emptiness,
 “ The soul can comfort, elevate, and fill.”

YOUNG.

“ Hope humbly then, with trembling pinions soar,
 “ Wait the great teacher, death—and God adore.”

POPE.

In the mean time the allegorical account of the fall of man by no means satisfies me, or carries to my mind the evidence of being a rationally consistent account. It is so far from removing difficulties, that in my view it is attended with insurmountable obstacles, and is the fruitful parent of dangerous errors. I do not desire to disguise difficulties, and am therefore ready to acknowledge, that I cannot comprehend, with full satisfaction, our proneness to evil, which, however, the best of men feel. I have no doubt that this and every other circumstance relating to our present and future state are all ordered in the unerring counsels of divine wisdom. That we are placed here as probationers, with the liberty of choice between good and evil, and that there is a constant struggle or conflict between vice and virtue, is all that appears given us to know with full certainty. Further knowledge is reserved for a future state, when, I assuredly believe, every difficulty will be cleared up. It does not become

become us, in our present state, to attempt to pry too curiously into those matters. Obedience and attention to the discoveries of our necessary duties are the proper business of man, and of these the knowledge is not withheld from us.

Respecting difficult points beyond our present knowledge; it is better to confess our ignorance, than to adopt vague and figurative explanations, and attempt to dignify them by the name of knowledge: for by so doing, we fall into many errors. The busy mind of man is ready to intermeddle in things which it cannot comprehend after all its searching. The adherents to old systems are often very clamorous in accusing those who reject their systems, and view them as speculative fancies, with indulging themselves in unprofitable curiosity. They continue the metaphor from the story of Adam and Eve, and charge them with eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. On an impartial inspection, I think it will be found that the advocates for old systems and metaphorical allusions, for which they claim entire reverence and reception, are the persons who are most justly chargeable with attempting to pry into things beyond our comprehension. They boldly assert that they know. We more than doubt their knowledge, but content ourselves with humbly acknowledging our ignorance respecting them. Who then are the curious and dogmatical speculators? I think the asserters of those things, without proof, are the blameworthy persons in those instances—the others only exercise a profitable hesitation not to believe without evidence, and confess their inability to judge with sufficient correctness on those points. But poor frail man who can see but a little way before him, and on many of those subjects can exercise but a short-sighted and imperfect vision, rashly and boldly judges and anathematizes his brother, because he cannot join with him in his apprehensions respecting those things. Purblind himself, he condemns his neighbour for not seeing as he does. What lamentable effects arise from the bigotry and intolerance of many of the supporters

ers of ancient systems! The supporters of these systems appeal for authority to a book, which it evidently appears was written by the various authors with very different views. I apprehend the very best of the writers were men liable to err like ourselves, and therefore I cannot admit their evidence as indisputable authority, but reading the Bible as we would do any other book, I think we have a right to examine closely into the nature of its contents.

This account of the fall of man appears to be given as an historical record; but whether it be taken as such, or be looked on as an allegorical or figurative attempt to account for the origin of evil in the human mind, is, I think, not a point of much moment. Taken in either sense, it does not, in my apprehension, remove the difficulties attendant on this subject, nor would it be considered to do so, if it were found in any other book than the Bible; and I cannot but consider it as an error, to insist, that every thing found in that book should be admitted as indisputable truth, however inconsistent in itself the account may be, or however it may be disguised by metaphor or figure.

The weakness of our comprehension to judge, is by many made use of as an argument to persuade us to take relations of various things upon trust. It is safe not to be hasty in forming a judgment, but this prudent caution is equally necessary to be attended to by those who assert the authenticity of such accounts, as by those who doubt concerning them. A salutary distrust of this kind might help to temper the fierce zeal of many of the sticklers for what is popularly considered as orthodoxy. Man is unable to account for many things, but I do not see any reason why, on this account, he should be called upon to believe implicitly; and yet this has often been alleged as a reason for his doing so. It would be unwise to believe every account, only because we cannot prove the contrary by demonstration. The short-sightedness of human intellect often prevents us from accomplishing this point. I do not believe in
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the existence of evil spirits, demons, and a long list of phantoms, which in former times disturbed the imaginations of many. It would be difficult, and perhaps impossible for us, with our present very limited powers of comprehension, to disprove, by reasoning, the reality of such notions; but we find that as mankind have advanced in intelligence and information, they have discarded these things as silly fancies, and the result of ignorance. When such notions were more prevalent, many accounts were brought forward of their reality. Now when some on rational motives discredit such stories, and others are rather ashamed publicly to avow their secret belief in them; they seem almost entirely to have disappeared. I intend in another place to speak of these supposed supernatural appearances; in this place I only bring them forward to shew the impropriety of requiring us to believe every thing, which, owing to our limited powers, we may be unable to adduce evidence to disprove.

I think it may not be without its use to examine into the rise of this doctrine of original sin, as it is now held. I do not find that it was a subject much spoken of, till about the beginning of the fifth century of the christian æra, when, in a controversy about baptism, whether it should be administered to children or grown up persons, Austin or Augustine brought it forward as an argument in favour of infant baptism, which it was urged was necessary to wash away the stain or taint received from Adam. By those who reject the rite of baptism altogether, this cannot be considered as a valid argument. Though differing in many points from the people called Quakers, with whom I was formerly in connection, I cordially unite with them in the rejection of this ceremony.

A doctrine may in a certain sense be well supposed to receive a tinge from the first author or promulgator of it, at least it may often afford a clue to unravel his motives for the propagation of a favourite opinion; and in this point of view the character of Austin is of some consequence in considering the doctrine.

Austin

Austin had been of profligate manners in his youth: he and his son, the offspring of an unlawful connection, were baptised together—Austin had then attained to middle age; he afterwards became a warm controversialist, having written two hundred and thirty-two separate books or treatises on controversial subjects; he was besides, a fierce persecutor of those who differed from him in opinion. Thus, if he forsook in his more advanced years the crimes of his youth, he appears to have only changed the vices of one time of life, for the equally noxious ones of his advancing years; proving by his conduct, that he, like many others, had only exchanged the vices of youth for the no less hurtful vices often attendant on more advanced years; and “This was the man (says Robert Robinson, late of Cambridge) who invented the doctrines of original sin, and of baptism to wipe it away.”

It appears to me by no means surprising that a man of his character should flee for refuge from the stings of conscience, and shelter himself under a doctrine that appeared to remove the weight of the responsibility off himself, and throw the blame on Adam, while, at the same time, he provided a cheap remedy by the rite of baptism, and the doctrine of the atonement. As was the man, so was the doctrine; a doctrine which in every successive age has had the tendency to set the believers in it at rest in their wrong conduct, and to prevent the earnest struggle to overcome the evil dispositions by individual exertion.

ON THE
DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT,
AND ON
THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE doctrine of the atonement may be considered as the counterpart of the doctrine of original sin. In the one case
guilt

guilt was supposed to have been incurred, before we had done any thing personally to make us partakers in it—a guilt which attached to us, from the moment of our birth, in consequence of the offence of a first parent or head of the human race: this may be called external guilt, and if this could attach to us, it then readily followed that this guilt might be removed by another act independent of us—here we have a guilt by substitution, and a righteousness by substitution; each tending to remove the responsibility of actual individual guilt from man, and I think we may with equal clearness trace both errors to the same source—the abuse of figurative language.

I have already acknowledged the proneness of the human mind to join with the wrong, and yet I cannot bring myself to think that the figurative account of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, through the temptation of *a serpent*, satisfactorily accounts for it; so in this case I think frail man stands in need of a saving power to preserve him from evil, and I cannot think that this redemption is to be witnessed through the merits of an outward saviour, but only through the immediate and ordinary operations of the grace of God, assisting us to choose the good and refuse the evil.—This grace or good spirit of God is always ready to assist our weakness. Let man strive against his evil passions, and he will feel a strength to resist and overcome them. The evil arises in the heart of man individually, and the remedy is to be found there also. In vain does man bewilder himself in the speculations of his inheriting original sin, and of a redemption and atonement through outward means and the merits of another: all these speculations lead him from the one thing needful, a close attention to what passes in his own mind: for there is the scene of temptation, and there is the scene of victory. Man looks out for that which only is to be found within. God by his good spirit is graciously pleased to assist us to perform our several duties; and the manifestations of his will are discovered through

through the intimations of a pure enlightened conscience, and the dictates of sound reason. This I call an internal revelation made in the minds of all.—Man is liable to mistake its dictates through want of attention, as well as from various other causes; but it is his business to discriminate between its genuine dictates, and the language of his passions, and of his prejudices. It is the business and the duty of man to separate between truth and error, and the exercise of this faculty, divinely bestowed upon man, strengthens the mind, and causes it to be skilful in the discrimination of good from evil. This engagement of mind necessarily requires earnestness and close attention; but the lessons that are learned in this manner, are far more to be depended on, than what can be gained from any other source; because this knowledge is practical, all other acquired by the teachings of man, or by reading a book, and calling it a revelation, can only be speculative.

It may appear that in the essential part of the doctrine of human frailty, and the necessity of experiencing a power to save, my ideas agree with those of many others—the essential difference between us lies here: they attempt to explain those points by allegories, and figurative accounts drawn from scripture, which, in my view, do not afford any clear solution of the difficulties attendant on those subjects; I hesitate to admit their reasonings, confess my ignorance, and admit only the simple facts that may be clearly deduced from experience; by so doing, I escape some errors that are closely interwoven with the figurative explanation, while I at the same time admit the plain doctrine of man's weakness, and the necessity of divine help to assist him in subduing his passions, and bringing his propensities within their proper bounds.

I think it may tend to a clearer explanation of the subject we are now considering, to state some remarks on the

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authority of scripture. The advocates for its entire reception, as believing it to be throughout the dictates of inspiration, get rid of some of their difficulties, by appealing to its sanction; however, they often only exchange one difficulty for another by so doing, if they follow on to further examination. All sects, as well as almost every individual, claim to have a key peculiarly their own for its genuine interpretation: by this means much controversy has arisen between the contending parties; some explained in one way, and some in another; each zealous for his own interpretation, supported it often with warmth, and attacked others, who as zealously supported their ideas. Some took it literally, others forced it to bend to their favourite plan, by attempting to allegorize it. It has been a very uncertain rule in the hands of its advocates, for endeavours have been used to support the most contradictory sentiments from its contents often with almost equal plausibility; and this is not at all to be wondered at, when we consider that it contains many contradictory assertions, and doctrines and commands the most opposite to each other—so that instead of finding certainty, and getting rid of strife, by an appeal to it, the Bible for many centuries has been the groundwork of the strifes and contentions which have agitated that part of the world calling itself christian. The application of this term of christian is in my view improper—it may have been christian in profession, but a profession does not rightly entitle to the denomination.

It may be seen how little the profession of the christian religion has done for those who have assumed its name. This, however, by no means derogates from the value of the pure doctrines taught by Jesus Christ—it only proves the inutility of a bare profession. Besides the long catalogue of vices practised by individuals, persecution and war, the dreadful scourges of our evil passions, have been sanctioned by the united concurrence of most sects. Here then let me ask, what has the *profession* of christianity done towards amending the tempers,
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and reforming the lives of those who have assumed the name of christians? I see christianity professed, but not practised. Many of the strongest advocates for creeds and systems, by courtesy denominated christian, have been strenuous advocates for war—a practice, in my opinion, whether conducted on defensive, or offensive principles, entirely inconsistent with the precepts of Christ, enjoining the patient bearing of injuries, and the forgiveness of enemies. Where have we seen more clamorous supporters of war, than among the body of the priesthood of the different denominations?—the assumed teachers of the people, and the professed followers of the God of peace! May we not justly say, in reviewing the black list of crimes perpetrated under the sanction of professed christians, by men of the foremost rank, and in the estimation of the superficially judging multitude, of supposed sanctity of manners. “O Religion, what crimes have not been committed in thy name!” When I perceived such palpable errors glossed over, and maintained by persons of high authority, I was led to examine into the creeds or systems which supported such errors in practice. I found other errors in their systems, and I lost all confidence in their authority. I said there are many errors in their practice. It is right to try their creeds. The more I examined, I detected further errors. The process, in my mind, has been gradual, and I trust I have not taken up my objections to the existing systems in a spirit of self-confidence hastily, or on superficial grounds. I saw many errors propagated under the sanction of what passed for religion. I paused, I examined, and at length it resulted in a conviction, that those systems could not be founded right which supported such errors. I looked around for something more pure, and in the earnest and sincere pursuit after truth, I have separated from all societies. I love real genuine religion, and most earnestly struggle to be obedient to what I conceive to be its dictates. I submit with resignation to the reproach which men may chuse to throw on me by giving the name of deist, infidel, or whatever other nick-
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name may suit their fancy. I am supported by an inward consciousness of endeavouring to seek seriously after truth, and I think I have often found it to lie in opposition to many commonly received opinions. It certainly is in opposition to many of their practices.—Such is the ground of my conviction.

Pure, unmixed christianity, the holy religion taught by Jesus Christ, is essentially different from that which is generally practised under the name. I think the general error lies in too readily yielding assent without examination; in believing too much and practising too little. Some endeavour to eke out deficiency of good conduct, by an extension of an unascertained belief, without examining into the nature or quality of it. A christian is not he who gives a cold assent to certain doctrines, but a christian in deed and in truth, endeavours to put in practice the precepts, and to follow in life and conduct the holy example of Christ. It would tend to promote right ideas, if the term christianity were separated from belief, and applied only to right practice. Then a nation or a man would not be accounted christian, because they merely believed—he only would be entitled to the high distinction, who followed after propriety of conduct. I fear if many of the controversialists that have appeared in support of doctrines in various ages, were tried by this rule, they would be found wanting.

It has been frequently asserted by the advocates for the reception of the scriptures throughout, as a revelation of the will of God, that without them, mankind would be perplexed with endless uncertainties, which could never be solved without their aid. But does the admission of those writings in the bulk, enable us to get out of these difficulties, or has it a tendency to put an end to controversies? Many violent disputes have arisen from opposite interpretations of scripture on doctrinal points. The pages of ecclesiastical history are almost entirely filled with accounts of those disputes. I think there could not have been
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more furious altercations and unchristian bickerings, if the book had never been set up as the infallible standard of revelation; so that for my part I see no advantage arising from making it a rule by which to try all controversies. I admit that many parts of it are deserving of the highest authority, but I cannot receive the mixed volume from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelations, with confidence in its genuineness or authenticity, as being of divine original. I see no other way of allaying controversies, but for all to endeavour to cherish christian dispositions, and under their influence, to seek out truth: then strifes would cease, and man would know as much as is necessary for him in his present state;—but until a genuine christian temper prevails, controversies will arise, whether we admit or reject the authority of the book. To be in reality christians, rather than to struggle only to appear to be such, is the point highly necessary to be sought after, but which has been too much neglected.

I suppose little is known with certainty about the manner of collecting that part of the scriptures called the Old Testament; they are properly Jewish records, nor, I suppose, is it known with what kind of accuracy they were kept. They contain so many inconsistencies, intermixed, however, with some excellent and truly sublime doctrines, that many are willing to give up the claim of plenary inspiration, as far as relates to them, who yet claim it in a much higher degree for the part called the New Testament. Yet still many difficulties attend these latter writings. Jesus Christ left no written memorials behind him. It is doubtful when or by whom the accounts published of him were written. I suppose the most careful enquirers have been able to find no genuine copies of an earlier date, than about the middle of the second century. If they were written by the persons whose names they bear, yet many interpolations and additions may have been made in the interval, especially when we consider the character even of that early

ly period of the church, wherein an apostacy from the genuine characteristics of christianity were but too apparent; for they appeared then, to have made attempts to substitute legendary tales for the truth of the gospel—indeed these ages present a thick gloom, through which it is impossible to penetrate.

It was easy, in this dark age, to put into the manuscripts additions, and in some cases to take from the genuine account, so as greatly to disfigure it. There are evident contradictions in the history of the four Evangelists, which all the art or ingenuity of harmonists have not been able to reconcile. It seems impossible for us to find out, with any certainty, how these things happened, nor does our inability to do so appear at all an essential loss to us. From a review of those matters conducted in a cautious and serious manner, it appears that we ought not to place an entire confidence in those writings, in the state in which they have reached us, but that each part of them must depend on its own intrinsic evidence and real worth, to command the rational assent of the readers. This is treating the scriptures as we would do any other book, and I am of the judgment, is the manner in which they should be treated: then such parts of them will stand, as fully recommend themselves to the rational conviction of the reader, as I think many of them clearly do; while other parts of them, will, with propriety, be held in less estimation.

Many, however, are afraid that if they give up the standard of scripture, they would be involved in uncertainties and perplexities. I have endeavoured to shew that by an adherence to scripture, these difficulties have not been obviated; but that opposite interpretations have supplied a great fund of controversy, in the management of which every one has in reality judged for himself. He put his own construction on the different parts of it, and in reality constituted himself the judge of its meaning. What can any one do more, when he lays aside the
book

book and judges for himself without it? He formed his own opinion before, he does so still. It is right that he should think with caution, and judge with the hesitation becoming a being whose powers in this state of existence have not arrived at maturity; but as every man is bound to find out truth, and if he do not discover it for himself, he must remain ignorant of it—he ought to be earnest in his search after it, and the difficulty of finding it out, or the danger of missing it in the search, are no sound arguments against his endeavours to do his best in the search. As reasonable would it be for a man always to sit still, and never seek for food to support animal life, for fear of meeting with poison instead of food, or of falling into some pit or snare while he was looking for it:—this would be indolence, but not virtue.

The mind of man is constituted on active principles, his search after knowledge is allowable, nay even it is his duty; and if he search with becoming earnestness and modest caution, he will gain instruction in the search:—the difficulties he meets with, will tend to his improvement, and his very disappointments will prove serviceable to him, because they will teach him increasing caution and humility. Under the influence of these dispositions, the serious enquirer after truth need not fear to follow on in the path of enquiry, even though he should find it to lead him to conclusions widely different from those adopted by the multitude.

Far be it from me to say the least to lessen the veneration for the most excellent and holy pattern ever shewn to man, as exemplified in the blameless and unspotted life of Jesus Christ. Although in the historical relations we have of him, in the writings of the Evangelists, there appear to me many obscurities and contradictions, and some accounts which I cannot receive with entire confidence; yet, notwithstanding, his character shines conspicuously beautiful, even through these clouds. He displayed a holy example of meekness, firmness, resignation

to the divine will, and in fine, of every virtue. I cannot enter into the question in what manner he was allied to the divine nature; it would have been well, if the framers of the various systems respecting his nature, had foreborne to enter into curious disquisitions on this subject; for all their curious distinctions and subtleties have not set the matter in any clearer point of view, nor do I think any enquiries of this kind, can, in any degree approach to certainty: at best they are but ingenious guesses.

The mind of man, when its attention is directed to enquiries within its proper sphere of duty, may be profitably exercised, but enquiry becomes injurious, if it lead to a field of barren speculations and attempt to explain matters which lie beyond our present state of limited comprehension. But the ever-busy mind of man is unwilling to acknowledge its ignorance, and rather than do so, either forms conjectures for itself, or depends upon the equally unsupported conjectures of others.

From these causes, and also from the abuse of figurative language, mistakes have arisen. In many cases, we have no solid grounds to go on to ascertain what is truth, it is therefore more easy to determine what is not truth, and here we proceed on safer ground. To find out what is not truth, may often assist us to guard against error, while we are restrained by the finiteness of our present knowledge from ascertaining on points not essential for us to know, what is truth. Thus in the present case I think I have sufficient evidence in my mind to warrant me in rejecting the doctrine of the atonement through the merits of Christ; and yet I find no sufficient evidence to guide me in speculating concerning his nature. The rejection of the former, I think, preserves from falling into a practical error; respecting the latter, knowledge is not requisite, nor would it be likely to assist in the punctual and faithful discharge of our several duties.

It contents me, therefore, to receive Christ as a pattern of purity, and a guide to follow after so far as I am able to trace his footsteps with clearness. It is our duty to endeavour to regulate our conduct by his precepts, against covetousness and other vices, and in favour of forgiveness of injuries, and the doing unto others according to the rules of the strictest justice, even though we should not fully receive the account of his turning water into wine at a marriage in Cana of Galilee,* and some other similar relations.

A loud cry of heresy will probably be renewed against me, for venturing to express a doubt on these subjects; but I feel without alarm on this head, being conscious of the sincerity of my motives, and knowing that I have no inclination to speak lightly of things really sacred. I think it right to enquire into ancient foundations freely, and I have not the smallest wish to induce others to follow me, unless a similar conviction attends their minds on a serious research.

My exposing myself to censure and reproach in thus venturing to express myself freely, may have its use in promoting among a few, a spirit of liberal enquiry, which may afterwards spread more extensively, to the removal of some popular errors, which have been long traditionally received. I cannot see the necessary essential connection between receiving the heavenly precepts of Christ, and endeavouring to make them the rule of our conduct, and the implicit belief of all the miracles, which are recorded to have been performed by him. Many of them I see no reason to disbelieve, because they are consistent with his character of infinite goodness; and I do not doubt, but it may have pleased

* If he actually performed this miracle, as it is recorded, it appears different from most others of the acts recorded of him. Healing the sick was an act of mercy and beneficence—the procuring an additional supply of wine at a marriage feast can only be considered as an exertion of his power, without an adequate end in view.

pleased God to endue him with infinite power also ; but if others were to go further, and deny more of them,* I by no means think it would unchristian them, while an adherence to his precepts and doctrines was made the rule of their lives. I sincerely wish that mankind would more generally learn, that genuine christianity consists not in professions, but in deeds. If they acted practically on this principle, a great reformation would take place in the world. Let us always bear in mind this essential truth, that practice is superior to belief.

It is necessary carefully to unravel the plain, simple meaning from the labyrinth of figurative language. Christ was the especial messenger and the sent of God. He was the chosen instrument of publishing to the world a comprehensive system of morality, more pure than any that had ever before been taught. He came to free the Jews from the bondage of a ceremonial law, and mankind from the mental shackles of gross groveling superstition and idolatry. In this sense he may be called a Saviour ; but this term has been so much abused, I hesitate to make free use of it without explanation : for I cannot bring myself to believe, that he brought salvation to mankind, by bearing their iniquities, by his death upon the cross.

In this very expression of "the cross of Christ;" we may see the liability of figurative expressions being perverted to support gross ideas entirely contrary to the design of the speaker. Christ appears to have used the term of "taking up his cross," to denote living a life of virtuous self-denial ; yet this figure has been grossly abused, and the interpretation limited to the cross, on which he was crucified. In the more dark ages, the wood of the true cross, as it was termed, was eagerly sought

* The story of the fruitless figtree appears strange, as we have it recorded, Matt. xxi, and Mark xi. I cannot receive it as it is now written. It may have been expressed by way of a strong figure, and the accuracy of the expression may by some means* have been lost to us. As it is related, it is inconsistent with the character of Christ.

sought after, and esteemed a sacred relic, until it became an object of great imposture. Some bow to a crucifix, as if an outward representation could retain any virtue. Among sects boasting to be more enlightened, I fear the cross of Christ is frequently spoken of, and a reliance placed on his sufferings on it, by many, who are nevertheless practically unacquainted with the necessity and true nature of a life of self-denial.

Where the benefit of his example is known, it doubtless is of advantage, by shewing the most excellent example of every thing that is good. But figurative language has, in this case, in my apprehension, corrupted the genuine simplicity of the gospel. Mankind have, in all ages, been too prone to form to themselves a representation of God drawn from a resemblance to their own passions and dispositions. The general mistake has been to represent God as actuated by human passions and prejudices. Man has formed representations of God after his own image, and the same has been done respecting Christ. They have speculated respecting his nature, until they have entirely lost themselves in the confused perplexity of their ideas. For proof of this assertion, I appeal to the volumes of controversy, which have been written for and against the incomprehensible doctrine of the trinity. They often divided and subdivided, and quarrelled with one another, about the most trifling differences. How much better would it have been to have wisely refrained from such attempts, and honestly confessed their own ignorance! but human pride revolted at this idea, and the unprofitable contest has been continued through successive ages.

It may be clearly perceived that I reject the doctrine of the trinity in any of its forms. I cannot see the utility of entering into those questions which have so long agitated the world on the manner of the birth of Christ, or of his glorified state. I acknowledge my ignorance on these and many other speculations of a similar tendency, and believe that man can attain to

no certainty respecting them in his present state of existence. These and many things even relating to our present and future existence, will remain hid from the most prying search, while we are surrounded with the veil of mortality. But I venture to suggest, that many, by viewing these things too much through the medium of allegory and figurative language, have bewildered themselves, and formed gross and groveling ideas on those subjects; and that most have been too outward in their views and interpretations concerning them.

The Quakers kept themselves more free from being entangled in those disputes than any other society. They commendably applied themselves in general more to recommending practical duties, than the speculative studies of points of doctrine. Yet truth compels me to admit that their first appearance as a society, was in an age of superstition and fanaticism; and therefore it is no matter of wonder, that they should at their beginning have retained some of their former prejudices, from leaning to the prevailing manners of the age. It appears difficult to collect with precision from their writings, what were exactly their opinions on some points of doctrine. They expressed themselves so unaccurately, that frequently in the space of a few lines, or pages, they made declarations of opposite tendency. Thus it is easy to quote Penn against Penn, and even the more methodical Barclay may in many cases be quoted against himself. I do not see the advantage of appealing to them as standards of sound sentiment. I deny the propriety and advantages of an appeal to the ancient fathers of any church.

The Quakers have in former times denied the prescriptive authority, claimed for those, who have been called the ancient fathers of the christian church. In my separation from connection with their society, I also deny the prescriptive authority of the fathers of their church. The question in the present day

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is not, what were the opinions of Fox, Penn, Barclay, and Pennington; (men whose general character in most respects I highly revere) but rather let us enquire, what is truth, independent of the authority of ancient names.

They, whose names I have mentioned, were justly respected characters, and I am far from condemning them indiscriminately for the ambiguity of their expressions. The progress of their separation from commonly received opinions, may be well supposed to be gradual in many cases; and if they wavered in their sentiments at times, it was the necessary consequence of their being serious enquirers after truth, and of endeavouring to keep their minds open to further discoveries. They only who have rounded their system, and determined to shut out the admission of all further evidence, can, with consistency, be in the habit of speaking authoritatively.

As an instance of the narrow, gloomy notions generally entertained in the first rise of this people, I adduce one of the early queries in use among them, and which was answered from the smaller to the general meetings, but from a change of times it has long since become obsolete—"What signal judgments have fallen on persecutors?" There are many instances on their records of casualties, which happened to those who had persecuted them, being interpreted as signal instances of divine judgments. These accounts should be admitted with great caution, and man should be very careful of assuming the right of placing himself in the seat of judgment, and taking upon him presumptuously, to condemn those who differ from him. I think the conduct of the early members of society may admit of some palliative excuse, when we consider they were smarting under the lash of an unjust persecution, and their minds were frequently ruffled by the irritations of controversy—in this state they partook, in some degree, of the general intolerance of the times; yet in considering their general

ral character, such conduct ought to be set down, as a deduction in the estimate; and they should not be held up so indiscriminately as patterns worthy of imitation in all respects. With some, the practice of extolling their predecessors, arises from an honest desire to promote piety among their fellow members, by holding up for imitation their conduct, which certainly in many respects was praiseworthy; but we ought to consider that caution is necessary in giving indiscriminate praise, and it is a false shame that prevents us from acknowledging faults in those whom we love, as well as our own faults. Many, I fear, are influenced by more unworthy motives. Some gratify their vanity and self-complacency by extolling the founders of a sect to which they belong—others by implicitly reposing on the opinions and practices of their forefathers, think they preserve their reputation among men, while they indulge in that indolence and indifferency to religious enquiries, which is the effect of their largely partaking of the overwhelming commercial spirit of the times.

I have introduced, with no unkind intentions, the foregoing allusions to the society from which I have separated. Some of them may think differently, and complain of my bringing them and their doctrines so frequently into review in my writings. I do not bear to them either collectively, or individually, the smallest ill will or grudge; and I wish to avoid giving unnecessary offence, but I think they have no right to be dissatisfied with my giving them a friendly hint now and then as I pass along. I think some subjects which I wish to illustrate, may frequently be more clearly pointed out, by reference to particular societies, than if I had confined myself to general remarks; more especially, when I allude to doctrines and practices peculiar to them.

It appears to have been a general error to form allusions to the nature of God from ideas drawn from kingly power: Christ is also spoken of in similar terms drawn from figurative

tive language, as a king's son. The next step was to incorporate him in the government, and then the doctrine of the trinity followed. Thus I think we may trace this doctrine, which has been productive of so many contests in various ages, to the abuse of figurative language.

The Quakers, by another mode, in which the ambiguity of figurative language, in my apprehension, has led into error, attempted to explain their ideas respecting Christ. They appeared not to have had clear ideas on this subject themselves, and therefore it is not to be wondered at, if they failed to communicate clear ideas to others, and hence the ambiguity so often conspicuous in their preaching. They used a figurative interpretation at some times, and at other times they explained themselves according to a literal sense, and not unfrequently they jumbled these two ideas together. I think this confusion of ideas and of expression may be thus accounted for.

They personified the divine influence operating on the heart of man, by the name of Christ, or Christ within, or Christ in man. This, if merely considered as a figure, may not have been injurious; for I am very ready to admit that this divine influence, let us call it by what name we may, was in a more abundant manner poured forth upon Christ; and as he possessed it in a superior degree, I see not much objection to call it his spirit—only a caution seems necessary, that in calling it by this name, it should be clearly explained that it is only called *his*, because he possessed it in a more eminent manner, to fit him for the divine mission on which he was sent by God, to bring life and immortality more clearly to light, by the doctrines which he taught, as well as by his holy example. But the term having been once adopted, mistakes soon followed, and the idea of Christ *as a principle*, was confounded with Christ *as a person*.

They thus adopted a figurative mode of expression, which might be taken literally, but which they also frequently allegorized

gorized—some in their manner of preaching leaned more to one mode of explanation, and some to the other; the result of which was as might be expected, a confused manner of expression, very liable to be misunderstood, so that frequently in addressing those of other societies, who were unacquainted with the peculiarity of their phrases, they were supposed to be preaching up Christ as a person, while in reality their aim was to direct to the inward manifestation of grace in the heart under the figure of Christ as a principle. It appears evident that it was in this manner in which they were generally understood, because when some broke through this ambiguous manner of expression, a loud cry of heresy and innovation was immediately raised against them.

The Quakers refused to adopt the term of trinity, because the word was not to be found in scripture, but many of them, although they startled at the use of the word, adopted the idea designed by that word: yet their opinions on this subject were never clearly defined. I do not charge them by any means with an intention to deceive, but their taking up the matter, partly in a literal, and partly in a figurative sense, caused much ambiguity in their own ideas, and in their manner of expressing them. I think great care should be taken to express our sentiments in such clear, simple terms that they may not be liable to be misunderstood.

For a long time the society proceeded in this undeterminate mode of expression, and each adopted his own mode of explanation; but of late some believed it right for them to enquire closely into those subjects, and when the result of their enquiries diverged from commonly received opinions, they thought that candour compelled them to speak out without reserve, their sentiments on the subjects of the trinity, and the implicit reception of the scriptures throughout as the dictates of inspiration. They were much harassed for a while, sometimes by a kind of public opposition;
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and at other times by whisperings and insinuations proceeding from persons willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike. These things were borne for a while, but at length the time for separation appeared to be fully come, and a minority judged it right to secede. Several have accordingly withdrawn from the society, actuated by a sincere desire to enjoy liberty of conscience, and to profess what they believe to be truth, although their profession of it is attended with much reproach; they have not gained the praise of men, but some of them possess what is far better, the secret consciousness of their having acted under the influence of honest motives and upright intentions.

Since this secession has taken place, those who remain, as if to act more strongly in opposition to those who have seceded, appear to be getting more round to commonly received opinions—they gradually approach more to those sentiments which are accounted orthodox, and the distance by which they were formerly separated from the other sects appears to be lessening: they seem more willing to make a common cause with them in defending what some account the outworks of christianity, but which others, I think, with more propriety, esteem the strong holds of superstition. The preaching among this people is at present much turned into the channel of preaching up Christ as a person, and the doctrine of the atonement, while some still object to use this term of atonement: but this is only stumbling at words, and admitting the thing dressed up in other language. To me it looks probable that this sort of conduct will cause them to dwindle away into insignificance. Their predecessors made a noble stand against superstition; the Quakers of the present day as a body, are, in my judgment, letting fall the standard that was once held up by this society against the diversified stratagems of priestcraft, and they may probably by such conduct gain more general praise among the indiscriminating multitude, as they become more assimilated to them. The pre-

sent current of public opinion appears to be strongly set in against reformation, and the society of Quakers, we are warranted in asserting, from a careful examination of their late conduct, on many occasions, fully concur in the temper of the times. Instead of being as a city set upon a hill, whose light cannot be hid, I greatly fear for them, that they will become more and more an association of worldly minded formalists. I now speak of them in bulk, for they have still worthy upright characters among them. May these lay aside their unnecessary alarm about innovation, venture boldly to examine for themselves, and exercise a free and independent judgment: for by such means the light of truth would be likely to spread.' Now many intrench themselves in the forms of their discipline, and suffer a few to think for them, to whose decisions they bow with implicit confidence; and thus the pursuit of gain is not interrupted by the task of reflection.

Some appear to be afraid of being put out of their synagogue, if they explicitly avow their sentiments. This reprehensible timidity often arises from those who suffer themselves to be actuated by it, not dwelling sufficiently under the salutary discipline of self-denial; for in this school only are the lessons of true christian courage to be learned, and in this school only we can learn to make the important distinction between a rash, hasty avowal of opinions on libertine principles, and that calm, steady firmness which is the result of serious examination.

But it is time that individuals should be aroused to see for themselves. I give those hints in love to the sincere-hearted part of this community. They are the warning notices of a friend. May those concerned lay them to heart. Societies and systems have fallen and been succeeded by others. These may probably fall in their turn, but as individuals attend to the renovating principle of divine intelligence, each will be enabled to accomplish the work of his day.

ON
BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER,
SO CALLED.

THE society of whom I have been speaking, were honourably conspicuous in their steady opposition to those doctrines. The investigation of those subjects opens an extensive field for considering the use of ceremonial observances. I believe it will be found that an attachment to them has always proved hurtful, by tending to stop the progress of further improvement. We need not wonder at the general reception of ceremonies, when we consider how much easier it is to be in the most scrupulous observance of them, than to attend to the more difficult task of regulating our conduct by the principles of justice, mercy, and truth.

The Quakers attempted, by allegorizing or spiritualizing these observances, to get rid of a literal compliance with them. I am inclined to think that this ground is not strictly defensible. I acknowledge, for my part, that I am not able to justify the omission of them from the letter of scripture. I think there is no doubt but that both these rites were practised in the early ages of the christian church. The account is positively expressed, that Christ submitted to baptism, but so he did likewise to circumcision and some other ceremonials of the Jewish law. Some doubts have been expressed respecting the accuracy of some part of the command, said to be given by Jesus to baptize. Of this I am not competent to speak, because I never made the accuracy of the present existing copies of the scriptures an object of research. Those who have attended to this subject, have not been able to find manuscripts of an earlier

lier date than about the middle of the second century. What interpolations and corruptions took place in this long interval of more than one hundred years after the death of Christ, neither they nor I can tell. This circumstance is of sufficient weight with me to destroy my belief and implicit reception of them in bulk: yet I wish ever to make this important distinction, that rejecting a part does not necessarily lead to an entire unqualified rejection. Where, on careful examination, they appear to contradict important truths, I think it best to give them up, rather than close up the way for all further improvement, by adhering to them contrary to evidence.

As for the command for baptism, I find it written in the book, but I do not know on what authority it is written. It may have been inserted as an interpolation afterwards, (this I think is the more probable conjecture) or Christ may have permitted baptism for a season, in condescension to the weakness of his disciples, who appeared on many occasions to have been actuated by motives and prospects of things very different from those which influenced their great master.

What is called the last supper, appears to be nothing more than a rite frequently practised among the Jews. The expressions used by Christ are by no means clear, and it requires much of that ingenious sophistry which has often been used to wrest scripture to confirm a favourite system, to make them apply as a command of perpetual obligation for the performance of this rite.

Seeing the authority of scripture must, from various causes, be so uncertain, it appears necessary to go on other grounds, on which to found the propriety of an ordinance, besides the letter of scripture. To have the validity and authority of a precept of Christ, it ought to be consistent with the general tenor of his other doctrines, as far as we are able to collect and separate them from the mixed state, in which they have come
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down to us. The general tenor of his doctrines was, to lead from outward observances to practical virtues, to substitute the genuine religion of the heart, that morality which enters into every part of our manner of conducting ourselves in the place of the cold, lifeless system of the Scribes and Pharisees. Against their practices, the general aim of his ministerial labours was directed. Considering the outward state of the people he ministered to, he might suffer some things to pass unproved for a time in the days of their ignorance; but I cannot think he sanctioned the continuation of those practices through after ages, in opposition to the whole tenor of his exhortations and example; and I prefer giving up a reliance on the letter of the text, to the admitting of the idea, that he commanded those practices, in opposition to the sentiments which he expressed openly and boldly on other occasions.

I revere the character of Christ, and receive his testimony as of a man endowed with supernatural gifts, and superior qualifications, for effectuating the purpose of his divine mission, which was to introduce, by precept and example, a more spiritual religion, formed entirely on the sure foundation of regulating the heart and the affections—a religion of practice, instead of one consisting in exterior shews and ceremonies, as it was then commonly practised. This outward shew of religion has been too generally substituted by many of his professed followers in the place of that which he taught: so that, comparing what passes with many for the christian religion, with the former modes, which it appeared to supplant, we can say little more, only that there has been a change of name, and some little diversity in the ceremonies, while the radical principle of an ostentatious, showy religion still remains. This, however, only proves, that the professed servants have not followed the example of Him, whom they call their master.

I have other reasons for not placing implicit confidence in some relations made in the scriptures, where they contradict themselves,

themselves, as they often do, and where they are inconsistent with the clear tenor of gospel truth. It appears that the disciples frequently misunderstood the meaning and the language of Jesus, even while he was present with them. May we not suppose that they were equally liable to make mistakes, after he was taken from them? If this be admitted, it then follows that they were fallible, like other men, and consequently liable to make errors in their accounts. Peter erred, when he denied his master. On another occasion, Paul withstood Peter to his face; and in this instance of diversity of sentiment, it must be admitted that both could not be right. I see no good reason to suppose, that they were not liable to err also in their writings.

Alterations or interpolations may also have been made by the subsequent copyists, through mistake, or design, during the interval which took place from the time of their being written, and the dates of the oldest existing copies; and these alterations may have readily taken place, when the manuscripts were scarce. It has been admitted that a material interpolation took place since, in the first epistle of John, when it was more difficult from the multiplicity of copies, which rendered detection more easy.

Besides, we find that the present collection was patched together some centuries after, by councils, who admitted and rejected at their pleasure. It is said there were one hundred and fifty gospels, out of which they selected the four they admitted. I have no confidence in the wisdom and candour of these councils, their conduct in many respects, and in particular the fierceness with which they persecuted those who differed from them, prove that they were not men of enlightened minds, or that their judgment ought to be trusted in their arbitrary decisions in what they rejected, and what they received. So that, upon considering all these circumstances, I do not hesitate to say, that where the language of scripture
contradicts

contradicts clear, plain truth, I prefer the latter, and give up what comes to us in so questionable a shape.

Plain dealing is best—notwithstanding an explicit avowal of my sentiments may expose me to additional censure, I proceed to take a short review of the diversified contents of this volume. History forms a principal part. The early part of this history, appears to be much wrapped up in allegory, and I even venture to add, in fiction. The early history of all nations, is enveloped in much obscurity, and I think the Jewish story is as much so as any other. It appears strange to me, that an unlimited belief in its authenticity, should, in the opinion of many, be considered as an essential article of religion.

I particularly object to the Jewish history, because God is represented uniformly by their historians, as partial to their nation. It forms a model for sectarian prejudices in later times. Besides God is represented as commanding them to commit acts of violence and cruel revenge on the neighbouring nations. As a representation of ancient manners, this history may be interesting, and prove not uninteresting, if we are only careful to divest ourselves of implicit confidence in the relations of the writers, where they assert the interference of God, and attribute to him passions and motives according with their low and degrading ideas of Deity.

The law of Moses has been a fruitful source of errors, occasioned by its supposed divine original, and the strained allusions, which have been drawn from it. Here the abuse of figurative language has been abundantly displayed; and many have been the errors which have arisen from making its ceremonies typical representations of christian virtues. The allegory was relied on, and drawn out to fanciful allusions, while the moral was lost. Men grasped at the shadow, and lost the substance.

Other parts of the scriptures are poetical. Many of the psalms are beautiful effusions, containing sublime devotional sentiments; yet an attentive observer may perceive some alloy mixed with the sterling metal. I consider it as an error to claim for those writings such a high degree of implicit reception, as to preclude all attempts to examine into the nature of their contents.—Surely it is right to deliberate, before we assent. It appears to me that it was nothing short of enthusiasm in some, and of a resolution to receive without examination in others, that has ranked the Song of Solomon under the name of a divine mystery. Let it be viewed as it may as a poetical composition, I think it has no title to be considered as of divine original. Many of its figures are not consistent with decency; why then should we waste time in attempting to spiritualize a rhapsody most probably written with views of a very different nature? There is an over fondness for mysteries, and an unprofitable hunting after allegories.

I have no doubt but that some of the Jewish prophets were men possessed of much integrity and honest zeal; but not without the mixture of human frailties. I highly respect some of their characters, although I think errors appear in their conduct and writings. They often attempted to instruct by bold figures, and assumed an allegorical manner of giving instruction. This may have been adapted to the state of manners in their day; but at present, without due caution, leads into mistakes, and an unnecessary imitation of their style.

As the nature of language is fluctuating, and as each passing generation has phrases and a style in some manner peculiar to itself, I think it is most suitable to adopt that mode of expression which is best understood in the present state of language. Strong figures drawn from ancient manners have been greatly abused, and not unfrequently misunderstood. Let us return to a greater simplicity of speech in expressing our sentiments on religious subjects. By acting in this manner, we should be like-

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ly to gain some important advantages, and we also would have more correct ideas ourselves, and convey them more clearly to others, if we accustomed ourselves to the use of language, of which we carefully examined the exact import.

Phrases may be handed down from one set of disputants to another, until they are repeated altogether in the manner of a parrot, without a proper discrimination.

I think the writings of those called evangelists, contain many interesting accounts; as do also the acts of the apostles. Yet I have many reasons for hesitating to give unqualified assent to all their relations, as well as to all the assertions in the writings of the apostles. Paul, in particular, uses terms hard to be understood. He had a fondness for mysticism and allegory, which often tended to mislead; and his writings in many cases appear to be deficient in clearness and simplicity. In my apprehension, he adhered too much to the learning of the Jews, and retained too many of their prejudices. Early prejudices have often a very powerful influence; and I think we may discover the man brought up at the feet of Gamaliel in Paul, after he became a disciple of Christ.

To this source may we not trace some of the early corruptions of Christianity? For under such management, christianity assumed too great a resemblance to the Jewish system, and like to this model, it became, to an injurious degree, a religion of ceremony and outward observations. Those called the fathers, in succeeding ages, still further helped forward this tendency, so that if we look to the systems taught by many under the name of christianity, the adherence to the genuine precepts of Christ forms but a very small part of the mixed mass—the pure wheat is almost lost in the chaff.

I think many difficulties will be cleared up, if we only agree to allow, that the fallibility which we are ready to admit to belong to mankind in their present state, attaches itself likewise to the writers of scripture. When this allowance is granted, nothing will be detracted from their real merit, but I think their writings may become more extensively beneficial in the search after truth. As matters are managed at present, their authority is often erroneously adduced to stop all further enquiry, and to silence the still small voice of wisdom urging us to make progress in the necessary work of serious research.

ON THE
SUPPOSED INFLUENCE OF
AN EVIL SPIRIT, OR THE DEVIL,
TEMPTING MAN TO COMMIT EVIL.

This appears to me to be another error arising from the abuse of figurative language, and an unsatisfactory attempt to account for the proneness in human nature to do wrong. In my view, it by no means gives an explanation of the matter in question: it would be better in this case also to acknowledge our ignorance, than to erect a system to account for it, that tends to remove the responsibility of wrong conduct from man, which the idea of a powerful tempter, has a strong tendency to do.

The ideas of the influence of demons, or the possession of evil spirits appear to have been popular prejudices among the Jews in the days of Christ; much like the belief of second sight in Scotland, of witchcraft in New England, and other places, and of the fanciful train of fairies, elves, &c. among the un-
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structed in Ireland. Other places also have their share of these and similar popular delusions.

As mankind have become enlightened, these superstitious notions have gradually fallen into discredit. Some time ago, I thought rational ideas had prevailed on those subjects to a greater degree, than I have since found to be the case; but slowly retiring superstition has of late made strong struggles to resume its dominion over the human mind; and I fear it will be found, that it exists with greater influence, than some of the friends of liberal enquiry had some time ago supposed. Yet still I trust its power is lessened, and without indulging too much in visionary hopes, I trust it will continue to lessen, and that rational knowledge will more generally work its overthrow.

So far as knowledge has prevailed, superstitious notions have lost their hold; and more correct sentiments have, on some subjects, gained ground; although not so much as had been hoped for—and to this gradual progress of knowledge, it is owing, that the stories of the agency of preternatural appearances less readily now receive credit. Few now-a-days are hardy enough to advance accounts of such things on the grounds of pretended actual knowledge, because they expect they would not gain credit for their relations; but if there was a readiness to believe, I have no doubt but there would be numerous stories told with much plausibility and positiveness, to gratify this credulity. Let people but stretch their belief as to these things, and many would step forward to impose upon them—and on the contrary, when less ready assent is given, and mankind exercise their reason more, these stories gradually die away, or become a faint echo. We find in an age of darkness and credulity, vast numbers of legendary tales were invented to gratify this desire of affecting the marvellous, which so generally prevailed.

To probe inveterate errors fully, it requires to proceed with firmness, and to guard against too great a degree of timidity, and a fear of giving offence.

In the course of my examining into these matters, I have again to encounter the authority of scripture. The relation of Christ's temptation in the wilderness will be adduced against me. I answer without reserve, that I do not believe that the transaction happened, as it is recorded in the New Testament. It may have been intended as an allegory, or it may have been a popular tradition among the multitudes that for a season followed him from the love of novelty—from them it may have been taken up by the original writers, who, we may suppose, might possibly in some instances have erred in penning their relations; or what is still more likely, it may have been the fabrication of that after period, to which I have already more than once alluded, between the death of Christ and the middle of the second century, before the existence of the present copies of those writings. I admit that it may be impossible, by conjecture, to approach to any thing like to certainty, and therefore I wish to repress a disposition too curiously to speculate concerning it: but still I do not hesitate to reject the literal account. It carries improbability on the face of it, and although we must, from our present limited comprehension, be obliged to admit many things which we cannot account for, yet it may be possible, and I think has been the too common error, to carry the principle of implicit belief too far, in cases wherein we have the means within our power of forming a correct judgment.

Many things relating to our present mode of existence, to futurity, and to the nature and attributes of God, are above the reach of our comprehension to investigate, but it does not follow from thence, that they are contrary to reason. This appears to me to be an important distinction. Man ought not
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to extend his attempts to see beyond his powers of sight; yet he may exercise his sight profitably in examining into such things as are within its reach. He ought not to attempt to exercise reason on speculations respecting which it is beyond the reach of reason to direct his search; but he is not required to relinquish reason in examining into such things as it is competent to enable him to find out. Reason is a divine gift—it may be abused; but if kept within its proper sphere, it is a useful and necessary guide to us.

It may be further objected, that Christ, by some of his expressions appeared to sanction a belief in the existence of the devil. I admit that this was the case, if we have his expressions accurately recorded; but of this I have endeavoured to shew that great doubts may be entertained. He might have spoken according to the commonly received prejudices of those to whom he was addressing himself, without attempting to set them right on those points; for in regard to them, mistakes were of less consequence, than practical errors of conduct. He might also have not seen through these prejudices, and his exemption from them and some human frailties may have formed no part of the divine economy of his mission. This latter circumstance may make against the idea of those who receive him as God, but in no wise affects those who view him as a chief messenger and chosen servant of God.

I think the idea of a devil may be traced to the abuse of figurative language. It was a clumsy attempt to personify the evil dispositions in man. The Mosaic account of the fall gave sanction to this allegory, and the current opinions of the Jews in the days of Christ, still farther strengthened it. It may be truly said, that the greater part of the mighty fabric of imposture that took place in succeeding ages, was formed after the model of scripture. I have freely expressed my thoughts on the degree of credit which should be attached to scripture evidence.

dence. It ought to be carefully weighed, and neither received nor rejected without due examination. In the present case I cannot receive its testimony in an unqualified manner.

I do not believe that any malignant spirit is tempting me, and desirous to work my downfall. The only temptation whose power we have to dread, arises from the influence of our own passions and unsubjected wills, and if we struggle with earnestness to keep this devil or evil spirit from leading us wrong, we have nothing to fear either from the attacks or temptations of an external agent in leading us astray. I fully admit the testimony of James in this case, when he says, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of *his own* lust, and enticed."—James I. 14.

I have endeavoured thus freely, but I trust not rashly, to pluck up some popular errors, or what I consider to be such. I know the many have their minds closed up against the reception of such things. I write, because I think it a duty to contribute my small efforts to the overthrow of the mighty fabric of superstition. Even now a few may be willing to examine for themselves, and I trust the number of serious enquirers will increase—who will examine for themselves, prove all things, and only hold fast that which is good.

The cause of enquiry has been taken up by many persons on various grounds. We ought not to be frightened from narrowly examining for ourselves, because some of ungodly lives, and others whose reputation have in some cases been unjustly blasted by the breath of calumny, have gone before in this work. I do not appear as the apologist for any set of men; but I earnestly desire that truth may be followed for its own sake, let it be received or rejected by whom it may. I do not intentionally advance any thing that I believe is not consistent with truth. In some cases I may be mistaken, and therefore I do not
call

call upon my readers to receive, but only impartially and without prejudice to examine what I advance. If they begin and continue the search with proper dispositions, let it terminate as it may with regard to opinions, they may be benefited by their minds being habituated to serious reflection: it may lead to a more intimate acquaintance with themselves, and teach them justly to estimate their own frailties, and the limited state of their comprehensions.

We appear to be nearly arrived at an important crisis. Superstition is making strong efforts to hold its sway over the minds of men—a spirit of enquiry is raised; it is not extinct, though it may seem to sleep—old usages are not likely much longer to retain their former hold over the minds of men. If establishments and sects continue to throw obstacles in the way of enquiry, as seems to be their present aim, they may obstruct its course for a time, but they cannot ultimately resist the force of it.

Religion, from the abuse of its professors, is with many almost become a title of reproach, and in many cases it must be admitted, that there is too much ground for the reproach being taken up. I wish to see genuine religion flourish, and that every thing which obstructs the progress of it may be removed—that true knowledge may spread and increase, and that no longer it may be said, that ignorance is the mother of devotion. Ignorance certainly is the parent of superstition; but piety and virtue, which may be emphatically called godliness, arise from a just knowledge of our duties, and a lively, ardent desire to fulfil them. I thus conclude my present labour with expressing the effusions of my heart, and my earnest desires for the promotion of real practical religion, and of a more strict and comprehensive morality consistent with its precepts.

Lisburn: 9th of 1st month, 1803.

POST.

POSTSCRIPT.

THEY who delight in verbal criticism may, it is possible, find some of their favourite amusement in the perusal of the foregoing pages; for I was unwilling, by attempting to refine the style too much, to risque the enfeebling of the sentiments which I rather chose to express in strong but unadorned language, as what might be gained by refinement might be lost in strength. I seek not for reputation from a highly polished style, or flowing periods; my aim is to encourage a disposition to enquire, and for this purpose I have endeavoured to bring before my readers some considerations which I think contain important truths: yet, throughout, I wish carefully to avoid speaking in a dogmatical, authoritative manner, not from the affectation of modesty, but from a conviction of the necessity of speaking with becoming diffidence on subjects of which but little is known, and much remains to be known; for after all that has been said and written on religious subjects, a disposition to liberal and candid enquiry is, in my estimation, yet in its infancy.

I have, however, endeavoured to guard against downright carelessness in my manner of expressing myself. Of deficiency in one respect I am sensible. Having been accustomed formerly to the phraseology of a sect, in some cases I may have failed in expressing myself in terms sufficiently clear to the general reader. I have used some endeavours to divest myself of this phraseology, but where I have inadvertently failed, I request the candid reader to excuse me. It is difficult to change entirely our former modes of expression, and to break through the old association of terms, so as to be fully understood by those whose trains of ideas and turns of expression are different.

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While these pages have been in the press, I have made several additions, which are inserted in their respective places. I fear in one or two instances they may have broken in upon the more regular connection. To prevent further interruption of this kind, I think it may be better to subjoin some additional remarks which I am disposed to make, by way of notes, with reference to the passages in the body of the work, to which they immediately relate.

Page 8, line 3.—[God represented as acting under the influence of human passions.]

To the idea of ascribing human passions to God, may, in my judgment, be traced the doctrines of election and reprobation. God is represented under the figure of a king, from hence the transition to the abuse of the figure, in supposing him to act with despotic sway was easy. He elected some and rejected others, of his own good pleasure.

John Calvin, when closely pressed in his support of these doctrines, might well call it *a horrible decree*. It appeared to be under the irresistible influence of truth operating on his mind, for the moment, that he made this declaration, although he speedily lost the impression, in his fondness for his favourite dogma. Without presuming to scan the ways of God in his moral government of the world, I cannot but feel repugnance at such erroneous misrepresentations as are held out in these and similar doctrines. But such has ever been the case, when man has attempted to explore beyond the reach of his understanding. Let us in humility, the result of a consciousness of our imperfect knowledge, leave those things which we do not understand, and which do not concern us, and trust with confidence that all will be ordered for the best, both for the particular and for the general good, although shortsighted as we are, we cannot see the hand which directs the whole. It is wisdom to confess our ignorance, and not to attempt, by imperfect reasonings, to account

for those things which we cannot comprehend. In dutiful submission, let us cease from a desire to pry into the unsearchable designs of God in the government of his creation. By indulging ourselves in false reasonings, and by attributing motives to him, which we see to be ruling passions in ourselves and our fellow men, we depart widely from forming just ideas of the great Supreme.

Page 19, line 11.—[The consoling hopes of immortality.]

Objects frequently appear to us very different from the medium through which they are viewed. To me the soul-solacing hope of an immortality, such as a Being of infinite power and infinite goodness shall appoint, affords the greatest comfort in the diversified scenes of good and evil in this life; and without it, life would appear a burden. I think some err in requiring mathematical demonstration on a subject incapable of such proof. We know little with certainty of our present mode of existence. What gives us the power of motion and volition is incomprehensible to us, yet we know we do exist. So, although we know nothing of the manner in which we shall exist hereafter, I find no rational cause to doubt that we shall exist in some manner consistent with the divine economy. I avoid prying into the manner of this existence, but content myself with a firm conviction of the certainty of it deeply impressed upon my mind.

Disputes about the manner, have a tendency to shake the belief in the reality of a future state, because men then dispute about what they do not understand, and may thus be led to give too much scope to doubting. I am fearful that disputes about the doctrines of materiality and immateriality, and other incomprehensible points of this nature, have had a tendency to bewilder. When an error has been long taught, it often happens that another error is brought forward to oppose it. In such cases will it not be better to avoid entering into a discussion, or an attempt to weigh error against error? The learning of the schools
abounds

abounds too much in this unproductive labour. A shorter course appears to me, to examine what is truth, without looking much to what others have said either for or against certain opinions. To begin on new ground, without regarding former controversies, would greatly promote the elucidation of many difficult subjects, which have been obscured by the former manner of treating them.

The doctrine generally maintained by the Unitarians, that the grounds of a belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, are only to be found in the scriptures, has also a tendency to shake a belief in this important doctrine, when doubts are entertained of the entire inspiration of the scriptures. These writings do not clear up the difficulties which present themselves to my mind; but I think the doctrine is established on surer grounds than on the authority of a book: it is written legibly in many of the characters of the human mind. If we are careful to endeavour to live godly lives, to make such a hope consolatory to us, and do not puzzle ourselves with too curious metaphysical distinctions, and looking for stronger evidence than is consistent with our present imperfect knowledge, we shall not be likely to be long or permanently distressed with doubts on this subject.

Page 35, line 10.—[Figurative language has corrupted the genuine simplicity of the gospel.]

I doubt very much the propriety of attempting to express our ideas by figures drawn from ancient manners as represented in the scriptures. This practice often leads to great inaccuracy. Some very horrid representations and bloody scenes in war have been allegorized: but where is the benefit to be found in using this figurative language? I perceive many dangerous errors which have arisen from this practice. We might find more simple terms in which to convey the truths of genuine religion, than in the overstrained and far-fetched language of metaphor, often drawn from the wicked deeds recorded in a blood-stained history. The account of the wars recorded in the historical parts

parts of the scripture, is aggravated by the assertion frequently repeated, that they were undertaken by divine command. So far the relations of them is more injurious, and has a more powerful tendency to strengthen practical sentiments for war than those recorded in other histories, where this assertion is not made. Can a mind, deeply impressed with a belief that God changes not, and that wars are unlawful, consent to draw figurative allusions from those wars of former times? Much of palliation may be admitted, when it was practised without reflection; but I think, continuing in it after the error has been pointed out, through an obstinate adherence to former custom, must injure the delicate feelings of integrity in those who still persist. I particularly allude to the practice of many preachers among a people professing to hold war to be unlawful. I think it would be of great advantage if a change of style, less figurative, were adopted in speaking of religious subjects. It would also obviate many difficulties, if all allusions to metaphors and an adherence to a set of phrases learned by rote were dropt, and simple truth expressed in simple terms, such as might be suggested by the occasion.

I fear many keep themselves and their hearers from properly comprehending religious truths, by dealing so much in ambiguity, arising from the use of figure. In my apprehension the purposes of real improvement would be better answered by using expressions less hackneyed, and which, by being so often repeated, convey no very determinate meaning, but rather tend to mislead and perplex. Is it not a very unsuitable mode of conveying instruction, in representing the internal struggles of mind necessary against the temptations of our passions, to borrow the language used in the accounts of the Jewish wars? I think the simply stating, in plain terms, the necessity of this struggle would be much preferable, as being more intelligible, instead of obscuring the advice by wrapping it up in metaphor. The duty of humility, so necessary to man in his present

sent state, might also be expressed, I think, in more suitable terms than are generally made use of. To shew a man that he ought to think with humility of himself, it is not necessary to tell him that his nature is depraved, because Adam and Eve are supposed to have disobeyed a particular command.

The advocates for ancient systems, and the prescriptive authority of the Bible, will retard this necessary reform of the manner of expression for a season, but I believe the time will come for a change, as men advance more in the knowledge of true religion. I am fully sensible that the present time is unfavourable for reform—the adherents to old systems are making violent efforts to keep them up—some of the friends of liberal enquiry are hesitating and lukewarm, and very many of the inhabitants of these countries are ingrossed with worldly concerns, to the exclusion of serious reflection, while others adopt the trivialities of the learning of the schools, which is more conversant in words than in ideas. From these various causes, the interests of a pure comprehensive morality are overlooked—a morality which takes in the whole circle of our duties, and is found to be the very essence of religion; for religion is not a system of belief respecting external matters, but is, in reality, that vital, energetic principle in the human mind, which influences to good works on right motives.

Many disputes have arisen respecting the terms, religion, morality, faith, atonement, satisfaction, &c. which have been highly aggravated by the debates respecting them being maintained in scripture phrases, and by the abuse of figurative language, because the disputants on each side sought to strengthen themselves by attempting to force particular texts of scripture into their service, instead of examining into the nature of the doctrines they attacked or defended. The trial of skill generally consisted in the parties sheltering themselves, and galling their opponents by texts of scripture, often misapplied and misunderstood.

stood. These disputes might have been more easily settled if other language had been applied, and those phrases about which they contended, resolved into other terms—for scripture is not found to have the tendency to put an end to controversy. Scripture has been brought against scripture, and these points still remain unsettled.

The term theology has a meaning affixed to it by many, distinct from morality, and in the language of controversialists, is made to consist in a system of belief in certain mysteries, which even the propounders of them do not understand. Religion would, in my estimation, derive most important advantages, if the terms used in writing or speaking concerning it were rendered more simple, and at the same time more significant of the real meaning intended to be conveyed, and if every one would speak in terms consistent with the state of knowledge to which he has attained, instead of using the words of other men without trying and proving the meaning of them for himself. Many now appear eloquent in borrowed expressions; but if each only expressed what he himself had actually experienced, true knowledge would take place of the superficial smattering now too prevalent. Religion would not then be a mere theme for declamation, but people, instead of being only professors of it, would feel its *obligations*, and in good earnest set about reforming their practices by its precepts. The superficial professor may know speculatively what is right, but the true christian with the greatest earnestness endeavours to practice it.

I do not scruple to avow my full persuasion, that a new system will gradually take place, and that the change will be beneficial to the best interests of mankind—that the manner of expressing ideas on religious subjects will be altered, and instead of the dogmas of theological creeds, a strict and comprehensive morality will be unfolded.

Man, both in what is called the higher, the middle, and the lower classes of society, man in the state of an over refined
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and artificial civilization, and man in an uncivilized state, speaking in general terms, exhibit deplorable depravation. If we look around us, we must acknowledge that, in every rank, the state of manners is miserably corrupted; and so general is this corruption, that it is not a little difficult to determine with impartiality, which class of society is the worst. In looking for a cause for these effects, may it not be found in the systems taught for religion?

Belief in creeds and points of a speculative nature, and in the peculiar doctrines of the different sects, forms, in the estimation of most, the essence of true religion. Propriety of conduct is nominally made a part of the system; but we may see, that by most churches, an orthodox belief in their respective systems is more insisted on, than purity of conduct. If their members acknowledge the popular belief, irregularities in conduct are more readily passed over. This shews what is held in most esteem by many.

The change which I earnestly wish to see, is, that leaving knotty points of speculative opinions, greater attention may be paid to the punctual discharge of our several social and relative duties. Thus, if the objects of religious instruction were changed, of course there would be a change of the terms expressive of what will appear to the enlightened mind, to be the proper duties of morality and religion, no longer separated, but intimately blended and incorporated together. The religion generally current in the world, is an assent to certain traditions, often disguised by figures, and wrapt up in mystery; and the world's morality is often only a superficial varnish, which is rather calculated to hide defects, than to remove them.

The union of religion and morality is described by Christ, as consisting in loving God, and making this love the actuating principle of universal practical benevolence and good will

to our fellow men.—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”—and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets.”

I venerate these heavenly precepts, although I cannot receive many things recorded in the volume of the Old and New Testament. I endeavour to discriminate, and do not rashly reject the whole. In these memorable expressions, we have a truly comprehensive system of pure morality, which is indeed the essence of true religion.

Page 56.—[A more strict and comprehensive morality, consistent with the precepts of practical religion.]

It would be promotive of real advantage to mankind, if a pure, enlightened, and scrupulous morality were more generally considered as the foundation of religion—and if people were taught to consider religion not as consisting in a belief of theological dogmas, or an adherence to forms. A very lax morality has been the consequence of the system, which has too commonly prevailed; and many of the strenuous supporters of reputed orthodoxy of opinions, have satisfied themselves with great laxity of practice as to pure morals.

The object which I feel nearest my heart to promote, is a correct morality founded on the true principles of piety and virtue, such as we should always find to operate as a check in regulating our intercourse with mankind; and whose precepts should be a guide to us in every action of our lives. If this comprehensive morality prevailed, selfishness, and the long train of passions would be removed, which now, sometimes under the mask of hypocrisy, and sometimes without it, disturb the peace of mankind, and instead of that system of fraud, which causes man in various ways to prey on man, mutual confidence would be restored. It would restrain not only the grosser vices, but also the errors of conduct, which, though acknowledged

ledged to be wrong, are yet too frequently indulged in with complacency.

I at times please myself in the hopes, that my wishes for the amelioration of the state of man will not prove visionary ; but I believe if the prospects of substantial reform are ever realised, an entire new mode in the manner and the terms of giving instruction must precede. I trust the time will come, that the genuine principles of religion, as consisting in an amended and rectified morality will be more fully published to the world, by disinterested advocates for its propagation. Many teachers now have a selfish interest in upholding systems, from which they derive consequence and emolument. If pure morality prevailed, this hurtful tendency to selfishness would be done away in every class; and errors would not be upheld for the sake of the profit extracted from them.

If we made it our endeavour to do what is right on the broad scale, without looking too much to present advantages, it would have a tendency to do away selfishness; and acting justly in the strict sense of the word, in our several relations, would go far to produce a spirit of peace in ourselves. The effects would probably reach to others, with whom we are connected; and by such means much mutual provocation would be avoided.

I admit the liability of man continually to err, from the violence of his passions; and that therefore watchfulness, and an earnest struggle, are necessary as a counterpoise—but with all the draw-backs from the weakness of human nature, the benefits of a corrected morality are, in my apprehension, incalculable.

I hope these hints may draw some to reflect more seriously on this matter. Perhaps, at a future time, I may venture to give to the public some additional observations, more particularly expressive of my ideas, relating to this interesting subject.

In drawing towards a conclusion, I anticipate an objection that may probably be made—that my aim in the foregoing pages has been entirely to pull down—to raise doubts, without bringing forward any thing like certainty. I answer, that I write according to my present knowledge or apprehension. In expressing my thoughts, I had no settled plan. I wrote from my present view of things; and if I should hereafter see occasion either to extend my views or alter my sentiments, I hope I shall be willing to do it. I object to the old systems, as extremely defective in many important respects; yet I have formed no new system. I think it most conducive to the interests of truth, to keep my mind open to further convictions, and to recommend it to my readers to do the same.

In the search after truth, it is necessary to guard against determining beforehand, what shall be the result of the enquiry, or how far we shall go; nor should we give way to unprofitable fears, that this enquiry may lead us too far from commonly received opinions. If the enquiry be conducted on serious principles, with becoming caution and diffidence of our abilities to make the discovery, we ought to be willing to follow truth, wherever we may be convinced it appears.

While we admit the fallibility of our judgment, we must also bear in mind, that men of high authority may also have failed to discover what is right in every particular; and that therefore it is unsafe to admit them as guides in all things. "Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged always understand judgment;" and it is possible to err as much in leaning to the judgments of others, as in depending upon our own judgment.

I think the subjects brought under review in this pamphlet, are of great importance; and if objects were rightly estimated according to their value, they would obtain more general consideration than is now the case; because mistaken ideas concern-

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ing them have a powerful influence over our conduct. I know that opinions, however well founded, are of no weight, if they are unaccompanied by right practice; but we should be careful that errors in opinion should not be brought to justify errors of conduct, any more than that right opinions should be held as substitutes for right conduct. A due medium ought to be observed, between the indolent indifference to opinions, whether they are right or wrong, and the endeavour to exalt opinions as being more essential than practice. When I speak of their relative importance, I wish to be understood in this sense, as recommending neither indifference to them, nor too great a reliance on them; for a tendency to the latter has often produced fierce contentions, which have proved destructive to the real interests of religion. While on the other hand, in the present situation of things, the minds of too many are *criminally* absorbed, in the over anxious pursuit of gain or of pleasure; and from these causes they are sunk into a state of apathy and listlessness with regard to the earnest enquiry, by what rules their conduct, in every instance of life, should be regulated, in order that they may faithfully fulfil the comprehensive duties of "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly."

I cannot but consider it as criminal to devote too much of our attention to the sordid pursuit of gain, or the intoxicating allurements of pleasure; both of which I think are equally prejudicial to the acquiring and cherishing of proper dispositions of mind, to enquire after, and to discharge our several duties.

If the mind is too much occupied in either of those pursuits, many selfish passions will be engendered, and hurtful habits formed, which will incapacitate us from experiencing those tempers being produced in us, which are the solid foundation of the christian virtues. It appears to me to be an important truth, very necessary to be frequently inculcated, that, from various causes, the minds of many are too much engrossed with wordly cares,

cares, to the injury of their finer feelings. I think this error has not in general been sufficiently pointed out, nor seen in its proper light. Therefore, although the remark may be abruptly introduced, I think it best to make it in this place, and earnestly to press it upon the consideration of all whom it may concern, that there are higher and more important employments for beings such as man, than to have almost the entire bent of their faculties turned to such pursuits.

To provide for our necessary accommodation in this life, is a duty; but it is only a secondary duty, and should not usurp the place of our primary duties—"our being's end and aim." If we reduced our desires to proper bounds, our wants would be few.

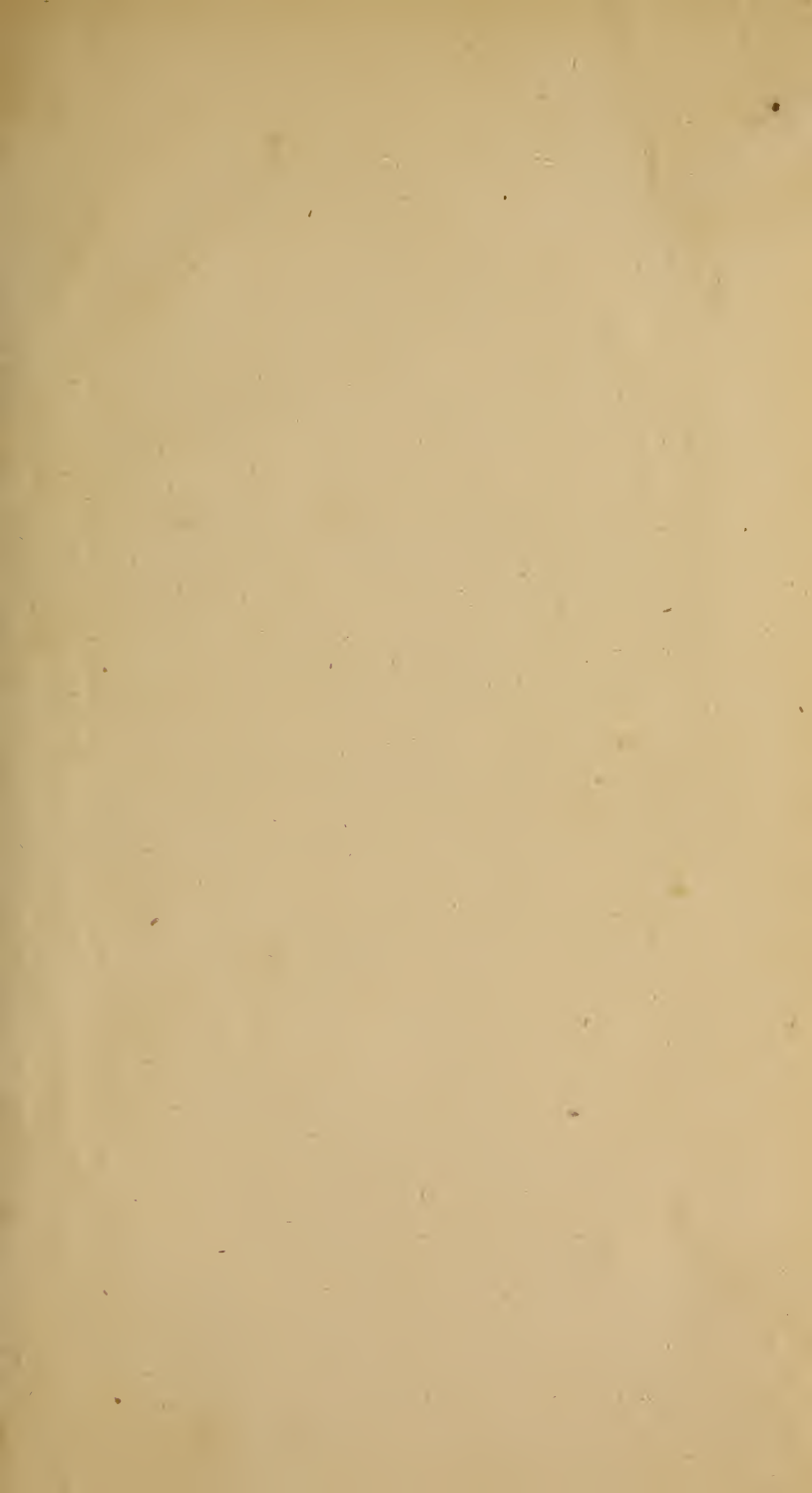
The proper business of life is to regulate our passions, reform our hearts, and struggle to subdue the propensities to evil, as beings, who look forward to a better inheritance beyond the grave, and who consider this world only as a lower link in the scale of existence, appointed for us as a place of trial, by the Almighty Creator of the universe; and in the boundless space of whose creation, this world is but as a speck. I wind up these remarks, with feelings of humble awe, arising from these considerations, and of unfeigned good will towards all of every nation and country, however divided into sects, or diversified by outward appearance.

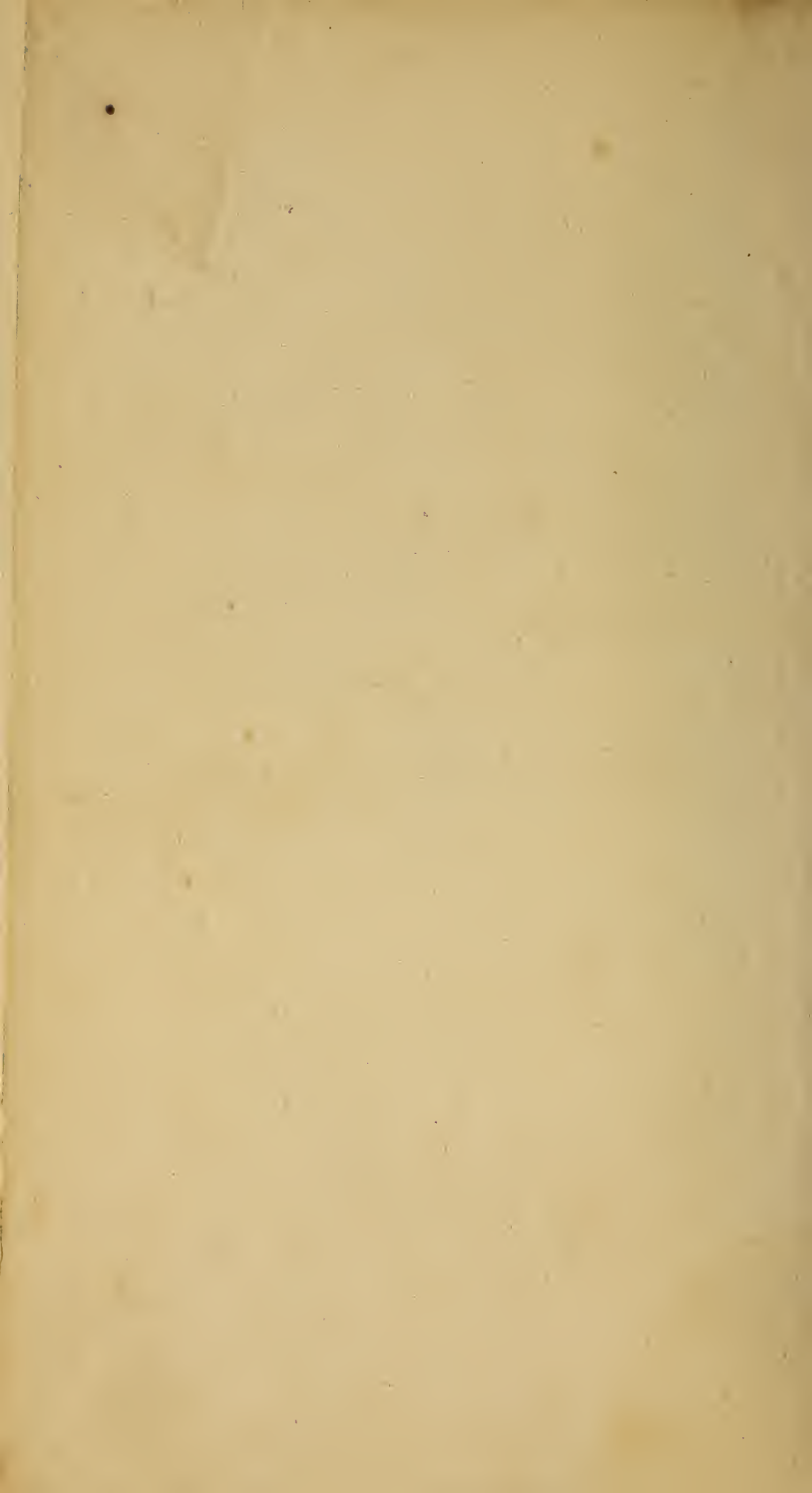
It is impossible, in the present state of the world, that all will think alike; but where we cannot join in sentiment, let us cherish a disposition to mutual forbearance. Let us endeavour after uniformity in acts of kindness and benevolence to our fellows; but with regard to creeds and opinions, where a diversity prevails, let us charitably agree to differ.

If any think I have expressed myself harshly in any of my remarks, I can with sincerity say, that I had no intention to

do so. However I may differ in sentiment from many, I feel a disposition to follow after peace with all men. I dislike war, and I equally disapprove of the asperities of controversy. I desire not to give offence to any; but I think it would be shrinking from a duty to suppress my sentiments from a coward's fear of giving offence. A conscientious mind cannot so easily give up the result of earnest enquiry. Such a search cost much anxiety, and ought not to be parted with in compliance with popular prejudices, often arising from persons much engrossed with other pursuits, and who have not deliberately and calmly enquired for themselves, but have hastily adopted the popular opinions without examination. If any let in resentment against me on account of my freely telling my sentiments, I must bear their reproaches. I desire to do it patiently. I know it is my duty to do so, whether I may come up in the practice of it or not. The holy pattern of christian purity "when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not;" and this disposition I recommend to be sought after by all who may speak or write on religious subjects. In this let us endeavour to agree, notwithstanding we may widely differ on other points.

THE END.





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